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STRAUSS, VIENNA
...AND KUBRICK?

The *Waltz*

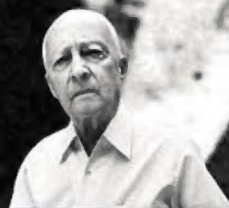
From its 19th-century
heyday to celebrating
New Year 2013

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MONTH'S
NEW
RELEASES



SIR ADRIAN BOULT

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Ian Bostridge



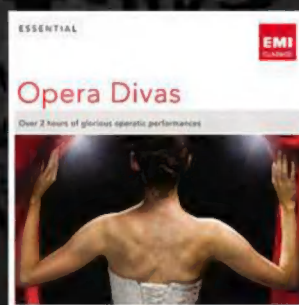
Recorded live in 2011 at the Aldeburgh Festival, which Benjamin Britten founded in 1948, this performance of his dark, intense chamber opera *The Rape of Lucretia* stars Angelika Kirchschlager, Peter Coleman-Wright and Ian Bostridge, with Oliver Knussen conducting. "Everything, without exception, was right on the money," said *The Guardian*, "... a dazzling success."

Other titles to look out for...



David Fray

David Fray, described as "perhaps the most inspired, certainly the most original Bach-player of his generation," launched his Virgin Classics career with *Bach* and this is his third album to feature the composer's keyboard music. "We shouldn't be afraid of acknowledging the expressiveness of Bach's music," says Fray. "The Romantics don't have a monopoly on expressivity!"



Essential Classics Series

Drawn from the catalogues of EMI Classics and Virgin Classics, this series present a selection of the best-loved and most popular classics performed by the world's leading artists. The series include: *Essential Opera Divas* (Essential Classics series); *Essential Gregorian Chant* (Essential Classics series); *Essential Verdi* (Essential Classics series); *Essential Choral Classics* (Essential Classics series); *Essential 20th Century Classics* (Essential Classics series).



Niu Niu

EMI Classics is proud to announce the first international CD release by the 15-year-old Chinese piano prodigy Niu Niu, featuring Franz Liszt transcriptions and paraphrases of compositions by Schubert, Wagner, Paganini and two original works by Liszt himself.



Verdi

This very special EMI Classics releases marking the bicentenary of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi, which will occur on 10 October 2013. Including: *Verdi: Opera Highlights*, *Verdi: The Great Operas*, *Verdi: Overtures & Choruses*. The operas of Verdi today are performed in opera houses all over the world and his status as one of the greatest opera composers of all time has never been higher.

Sounds of America

Gramophone's guide to the classical scene in the US and Canada



Reviews New recordings from St Louis, Chicago and Baton Rouge » **The Scene** Live highlights – page VII

C Baker

The Glass Bead Game^a. Awaking the Winds^a.

Shadows: Four Dirge-Nocturnes^a.

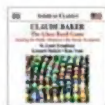
The Mystic Trumpeter^b

St Louis Symphony Orchestra /

^aLeonard Slatkin, ^bHans Vonk

Naxos American Classics © 8 559642 (67' • DDD)

Recorded 1991-99



St Louis Symphony profile former resident composer

Whether he is making subtle references to music of distant eras or applying his own contemporary stamp, Claude Baker has a way of drawing the listener into sonic worlds both intriguing and eloquent. The works on this disc reveal the American composer's command of dramatic tension, metaphoric imagery and orchestral colour.

Baker drew inspiration for *The Glass Bead Game* from the Hermann Hesse novel that warns society about embracing the past at the risk of future knowledge and creativity. The three movements unfold through an array of techniques, including quotations from other works. The *tour de force* is the third movement, named for Hesse's novel, a fantasia in the form of a collage of music by six major composers.

Awaking the Winds eschews programmatic allusions, instead allowing Baker to exult in an abstract narrative he brings to vivid life with expressive extremes and a rainbow of instrumental hues. The composer achieves a series of wondrous and spare textures in *Shadows: Four Dirge-Nocturnes*, based on Japanese haiku verses and incorporating delicate homages to Britten, Stravinsky and, most hauntingly, Mahler. Walt Whitman poems motivated the activity in the two movements of *The Mystic Trumpeter*, another example of Baker's gifts for melding disparate musical languages and quotations (Ives, Messiaen, Rochberg) into potent and poetic images.

The performances by the St Louis Symphony (which Baker served as composer-in-residence during the 1990s) under former music directors Leonard Slatkin and Hans Vonk brilliantly convey the spectrum of beguiling sonorities and styles built into these significant scores. **Donald Rosenberg**

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Nicole Cabell

The American soprano on finally recording Ricky Ian Gordon's songs for her disc 'Silver Rain'

What attracted you to Gordon's music?

I grew up on American musical theatre and jazz, and Ricky has this wonderful ability to combine hints of those styles within a classical genre. The first time I met him was in 2002 during my first year in the young artist programme at Lyric Opera Chicago. We had a black-box theatre production of his opera *Morning Star* and I just absolutely fell in love with his music. We didn't meet up again until 2008, at the doctor's office of all places! I was a paranoid singer getting my vocal cords checked out and he was a paranoid composer getting his ears checked out. It was serendipity – after that we re-fell in love with each other professionally.

For 'Silver Rain', you focus solely on songs set to Langston Hughes's poetry...

As an African-American woman in America, you learn about his poetry by osmosis. Ricky



is very sensitive on an emotional and spiritual level to people's pain and he has the ability to tap into that in his music. Hughes's poetry is very raw, personal and unpretentious – and makes even more sense when it's set by Ricky.

Describe how Gordon writes for soprano...

His music is more difficult than it sounds. You're utilising all facets of your technique – there's a huge range, and you're singing very low to very high in quick succession. But his music also requires that jazzy approach: you need to incorporate swing and a lack of vibrato, but in a way that's classical.

What would purists make of this music?

This is genuine music. We're not taking pop music and singing it classically, or vice versa – it's being sung exactly as Ricky composed it.

Berg · Ibert · Weill

Berg Chamber Concerto^a Ibert Cello Concerto^b
Weill Violin Concerto^c

^aJohn Gilbert ^{vn} ^bGeorge Work ^{vc}

^aDmitri Shteinberg ^{pf} Baton Rouge Symphony
Chamber Players / Timothy Muffitt

Sono Luminus © 2 (CD +) DSL92161 (67' • DDD)

Blu-ray contains programme in 71 24-bit/96kHz
DTS-MA, 5.1 24-bit/192kHz DTS-MA and 2.0 24-bit
192kHz LPCM



Baton Rouge soloists with 1920s ensemble pieces

The three concertos on this new disc featuring the Baton Rouge Symphony Chamber Players have two things in common: they were written in the mid-1920s and

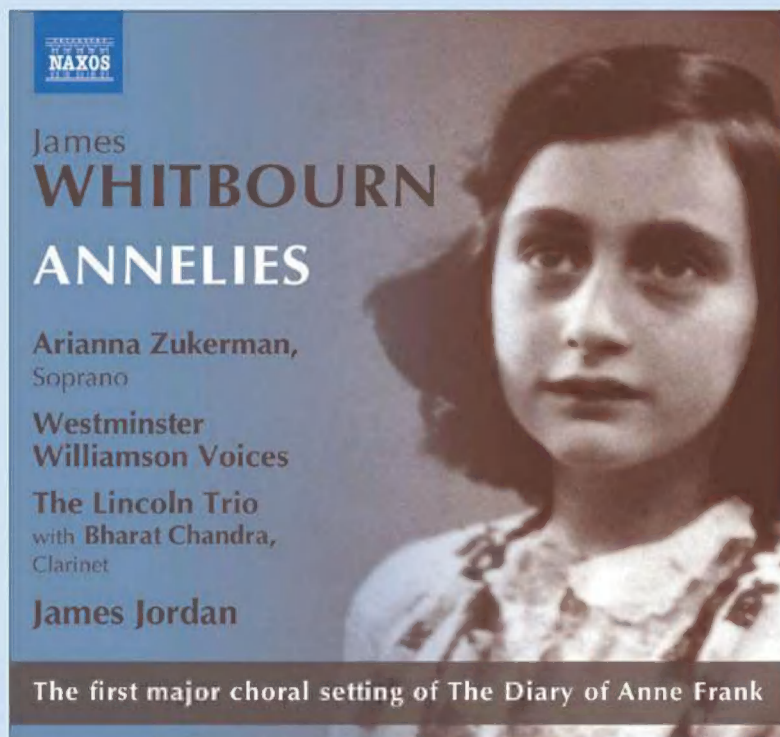
feature winds and brasses as collaborators with string and piano soloists. Yet the musical languages and scoring are sufficiently varied to ward off hints of monotony.

Along with Alban Berg's Chamber Concerto for piano, violin and 13 wind instruments, which only the most intrepid musicians take up on occasion, are two works that are likely unfamiliar to most listeners, Kurt Weill's Concerto for violin and wind orchestra and Jacques Ibert's Concerto for cello and 10 wind instruments. The last two pieces are well worth hearing in their own right, as well as to place them in context in each composer's canon.

The Weill bears traces of *The Threepenny Opera* from several years later, in the sardonic moods and lean textures. The violin does its temperamental thing with

James Whitbourn Annelies

James Whitbourn and Naxos present this World Premiere Recording, featuring the first major choral setting of The Diary of Anne Frank. This recording takes the teenager's remarkable and penetrating observations, written whilst hiding in an Amsterdam attic, as the basis of its extraordinary and moving libretto. Whitbourn's music for this work has been described as "woundingly beautiful" (The Daily Telegraph), as he reflects sounds of the Westerkerk bells and tunes heard on the radio in the Annexe, along with representations of Anne Frank's Jewish and German heritage, details that add to a score "whose respectful understatement is its greatest strength" (The Times). Features Soprano Arianna Zukerman and the Westminster Williamson Voices, conducted by James Jordan, one of America's pre-eminent conductors, writers and innovators in choral music.



"woundingly
beautiful"

– *The Daily Telegraph*

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Tension, imagery and colour: the late Hans Vonk conducts the St Louis Symphony Orchestra in music by Claude Baker (see page 1)

and against the winds, which are prominent characters in a three-act drama (and three-part second movement.) Ibert's piece sounds like so many of this composer's scores, full of jaunty spirit and idyllic lyricism, with the cello as romantic figure conversing with chatty colleagues.

The masterpiece here, of course, is the Berg, which sounds as impassioned, conflicted and intricately layered as ever. Nothing appears to cause anxiety for the Baton Rouge musicians, who dispatch the score's rhythmic and expressive challenges with handsome aplomb. Violinist John Gilbert and pianist Dmitri Shteinberg are vibrant soloists and the winds perform with cohesive and precise assurance under conductor Timothy Muffitt.

Gilbert is the able soloist in the Weill and cellist George Work brings suave definition to the Ibert. Yet what seizes attention more than the solo lines are the wind parts, a testament to the colouristic skills of the composers and the players' first-rate artistry.

Donald Rosenberg

Colina

Baba Yaga[®]. The Unbearable Lightness of Being[®]. Quinta del Sordo[®]. Flute Concerto, 'Isles of Shoals'[®]. Lukasz Dlugosz fl^a Anastasia Khitruk vn London Symphony Orchestra / ^{ab}Ira Levin, 'Ransom Wilson' Fleur de Son © FDS58018 (69' • DDD)



Orchestral works by Cuba-inspired New York composer

As is often the case with protean creative types, it is impossible to categorise New York-based, multiple Grammy-winning composer Michael Colina. Whatever the stylistic tendency or input of a given piece, his music is relentlessly, persuasively romantic and his command and facility with jazz, classical and pop materials allow him to perform *tour de force* such as incorporating Bach's *Sheep may safely graze* into the middle of a very ambitious and multi-dimensional flute concerto called *Isles of Shoals*.

Inspired by the sudden disappearance in 1912 of America's first artist colony, off the coast of New Hampshire, the 30-minute concerto haunts and inhabits a faded, fragile past during which musical visitors included MacDowell, Paderewski and Gubrilowitsch. The orchestral writing is sumptuous yet clear throughout, which allows Lukasz Dlugosz to weave a remarkable narrative.

Colina is equally at his best in an atmospheric, light-and-shade take on *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and an 11-minute symphonic poem called *Quinta del Sordo*, inspired by the house in which the deaf Goya created his terrible last paintings. The disc leads off with *Baba Yaga*, 20 minutes of

hyper-Rimsky-Korsakov for which Anastasia Khitruk's ravishing violin-playing makes a very strong case.

Overall, at every crucial point Colina finds an authentic emotional response by always being willing to let a tune relinquish a comfortable backing harmony to forge on alone into uncertain harmonic waters. Recorded in Abbey Road Studios, the quiet moments have a hushed intensity while the big climaxes are superb, thanks to audiophile work by engineers Simon Rhodes and the legendary Tony Faulkner.

Laurence Vittes

Fairouz

Sumeida's Song

Jo Ellen Miller *sop*.....Mabrouka
Rachel Calloway *mez*.....Asakir
Robert Mack *ten*.....Sumeida
Mischa Bouvier *bar*.....Alwan
Mimesis Ensemble / Scott Dunn
Bridge © BRIDGE9385 (63' • DDD)



Fairouz's opera based on Tawfiq al-Hakim's play

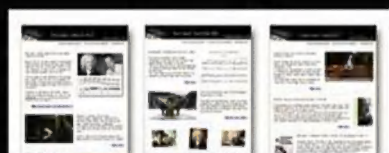
First, the good news. At a time when some observers might legitimately question the intellectual relevance of new opera, a young cosmopolitan composer confronts the key

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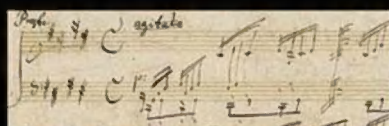
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issue of his culture – arguably the key issue in the world at large.

The music, too, has much to admire. For a piece that opens like so much raw Stravinsky and undigested Britten, Mohammed Fairouz bends his sources to such personal ends and dramatic means that you eventually forget you started out humming along to *The Rite of Spring*.

As a piece of stagecraft, though, *Sumeida's Song* suffers the problems of many first operas. Granted, Verdi and Puccini were hardly geniuses out of the starting gate, but at least they had a grasp of their source material. Fairouz's model – at least in terms of writing his own libretto – is Wagner, and *Sumeida's Song*, adapted from a play by the Egyptian writer Tawfiq al-Hakim, bogs down in a thicket of details. Even Fairouz's liner-note summary barely gets around to the point.

Hakim's tale of a village widow looking to avenge her dead husband and her educated son who eschews tribal violence in favour of modern ways has the potential of any Italian *verismo*. So too does it offer multicultural possibilities that Fairouz wields well in the score. But the actual story-telling is marred by a cumbersome back story and tentative narrative development.

Fairouz knows his way around an orchestra and handles voices lyrically and expressively, so he surely has an opera in him somewhere. In the future, though, he might want to enlist a librettist. **Ken Smith**

RI Gordon

'Silver Rain'

Genius Child. Heaven. In Time of Silver Rain. Harlem Night Song. Dream Variations. Stars. Love Song for Antonia. Port Town. Daybreak in Alabama. Dreams/Feet o' Jesus. Song for a Dark Girl. Litany

Nicole Cabell sop **Ricky Ian Gordon** pf

Blue Griffin © BGR253 (64' • DDD)



Former Cardiff winner sings songs by the stage composer

Every phrase in a song by Ricky Ian Gordon is wedded so seamlessly to the text that the result sounds natural and inevitable. These qualities pervade 'Silver Rain', the new disc of Gordon's songs set to poems by Langston Hughes and performed by soprano Nicole Cabell with the composer as pianist.

There are moments when Gordon's lyricism revels in the kind of rapture and warmth found in works of Samuel Barber. But Gordon also claims a compositional voice very much his own – one that is quick to convey feeling and mood through soaring and playful melodic lines, harmonies of subtle hues, and lilting or surprising rhythmic shifts. In short, the songs



Engaging: Eighth Blackbird record a patchwork of narrative works by living composers

on 'Silver Rain' – its name taken from Hughes's 'In Time of Silver Rain' – are gems of concision and emotional directness. The melting tenderness of 'Dreams' leads almost imperceptibly to the spiritual-inspired 'Feet o' Jesus'. Gordon keenly mirrors the essential optimism in Hughes's verses in the ecstatic 'Heaven' and 'Joy'. Even when the texts depict troubled states of mind, the music abounds in compassion ('Troubled Woman') and sly spirit ('Strange Hurt').

Cabell sings each piece in a voice of arresting opulence and intensity. She can scale back her soprano to a hush, as in 'Prayer', or send it into flight when Gordon and Hughes are inclined towards ecstasy. Gordon proves to be an ideal collaborator, treating the piano parts with utmost clarity of line and harmonic and rhythmic inflection.

Donald Rosenberg

'Meanwhile'

Adès *Catch* **Etezady** *Damaged Goods* - About Time; **Eleventh Hour** *Glass* Music in Similar Motion **Hartke** *Meanwhile* **Hurel** ...à mesure **Mazzoli** *Still Life With Avalanche*

Eighth Blackbird

Cedille © CDR90000 133 (68' • DDD)



EB explore kaleidoscopic diversity of new US music

Two-time Grammy winners Eighth Blackbird are at it again for Cedille. An ingenious programme of 68 minutes is sequenced as if it

were a concert itself, although in fact the recordings were made over the course of five sessions in 2010 and 2011. In each piece the performers seem to be exploring first what their instruments are going to have to do before setting out to play what their roster of composers has marked down on their scores, including three world-premiere recordings and only the second recording of Thomas Adès's diverting *Catch*.

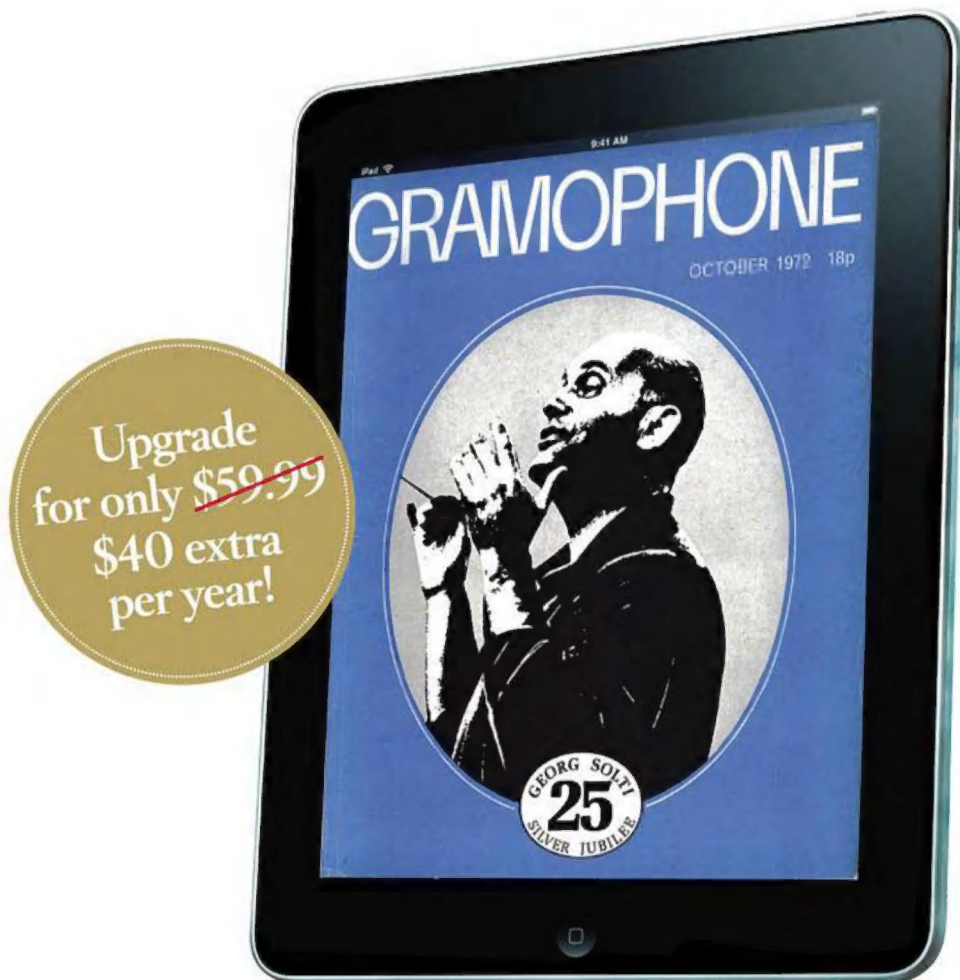
Of the world premieres, Stephen Hartke's miraculous *Meanwhile*, the CD's title-track, is an absolute prize consisting of five jaunty, Asian-infused movements, clanging and tootling with pleasure, which you would give anything to hum. Missy Mazzoli's *Still Life With Avalanche* and two movements from Roshanne Etezady's *Damaged Goods*, the latter written as part of a collaborative project with the Minimum Security Composers Collective, encounter more sober topics and produce more mysterious moods and occasional violence.

As the well-written notes reveal, there is an engaging story behind the way each piece came into being, along with such useful bits of trivia as the fact that Etezady was set on her path to becoming a composer at the age of 13 by seeing Philip Glass and his ensemble perform on *Saturday Night Live* – although probably not *Music in Similar Motion*, which Blackbird perform here with a kind of rustic industry which suggests the Glass engine exposed to the air.

Laurence Vittes

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THE SCENE

Operatic treats including *Don Giovanni* in Houston and *Die Meistersinger* in Chicago; world premieres by Elliott Carter and Wayne Shorter; centenary tribute to John Cage

HOUSTON

Houston Grand Opera

Don Giovanni (January 25 – February 10)

It will be fascinating to hear what Sir Trevor Pinnock does in his HGO debut, conducting Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. A harpsichordist and conductor, Pinnock is one of the pioneers of the period-performance movement and has focused his energies on the Baroque and Classical periods, tending towards brisk tempos and clarity of texture. This HGO production of *Don Giovanni* is a revival of the popular staging by the late Swedish director Göran Järvefelt. A youthful cast of singers includes Austrian baritone Adrian Eröd, making his debut here as the world's most unrepentant playboy, bass-baritone Kyle Ketelsen as Leporello, and sopranos Rachel Willis-Sørensen and Veronika Dzhioeva as Donna Anna and Donna Elvira.

houstongrandopera.org

MIAMI

New World Symphony

Centennial Tribute to John Cage (February 8-10)

There's a lot more to the composer John Cage than four minutes and 33 seconds of silence, as the musicians of the New World Symphony show in a series of three concert programmes celebrating this influential and provocative artist. Over the course of three weekend evenings, the NWS – with artistic director Michael Tilson Thomas – chart the composer's early career (when he made musical choices) to the middle and end, when he pioneered indeterminacy in composition, which challenged definitions about what makes music. This is a multimedia event, with screenings, panel discussions and modern-dance choreography by Merce Cunningham (whose radical innovations in modern dance were fired by Cage's music). A stellar roster of guests includes vocalist Meredith Monk, soprano Jessye Norman and pianist Marc-André Hamelin.

nws.edu/JohnCage

SEATTLE

Seattle Symphony

Elliott Carter: *Instances* (February 7, 9 & 10)

Hitting 100 did nothing to dampen Elliott Carter's commitment to composition. From 2008 until his recent death at 103,

EVENT OF THE MONTH



NEW YORK

Carnegie Hall

Orpheus CO with the Wayne Shorter Quartet (February 1)

This season marks the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra's 40th anniversary and showcases its ecumenical taste with world-premiere arrangements of compositions by legendary jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter, including *Prometheus Unbound* and a new work called *Lotus*. The concert opens with Beethoven's Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, followed by Charles Ives's Symphony No 3, *The Camp Meeting*.

orpheusnyc.com

he produced at least 14 works (according to his publisher Boosey & Hawkes). Well, here's another one – commissioned, and being given its world premiere, by the Seattle Symphony – titled *Instances*. Carter wrote this new work as a special gift to Ludovic Morlot to celebrate Morlot's new role as music director of the orchestra this season. Also on this programme, Schumann's Piano Concerto performed by the American pianist Nicholas Angelich, and Brahms's Symphony No 4.

seattlesymphony.org

CHICAGO

Lyric Opera of Chicago

Wagner: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (February 8 – March 3)

Lyric Opera of Chicago presents Wagner's only foray into comedy, *Die Meistersinger*, a lavish co-production with Glyndebourne and San Francisco Opera. It's another typically big sing for soloists and chorus, running at five-and-a-half hours. This production features powerhouse voices in the lead roles: James Morris as Hans Sachs, Johan Botha as Stolzing, Amanda Majeski as Eva and Bo Skovhus as Beckmesser. The original production is by Sir David McVicar – recently knighted – and leading from the pit is Sir Andrew Davis.

lyricopera.org

ST LOUIS

St Louis Symphony Orchestra

Lupu plays Beethoven (Feb 8-10)

Romanian pianist Radu Lupu performs Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4 conducted by David Robertson. It's one of the highlights of this musical trip around central Europe, which begins on the river with a performance of Johann Strauss's *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, via Beethoven, and ends up in the pastoral setting of Brahms's Symphony No 2.

stlsymphony.org

NEW YORK

New York Philharmonic

Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* and Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2 (Feb 14-16)

Maestro Alan Gilbert leads the Philharmonic in two monumental works. Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6, *Pathétique*, which Gilbert considers to be one of the composer's 'most intimate, profound, personal statements'. Gilbert promises he won't scold enthusiastic audience members if they applaud after the vivacious third movement. Also on the programme, Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2, performed by Austrian pianist Rudolf Buchbinder.

nyphil.org

Previews by Damian Fowler

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Prolonged exposure to Mahler can trouble and oppress as much as uplift the spirit. Not so in the case of the *Rückert-Lieder*,' says **RICHARD WIGMORE**, who considers the cycle in this month's Collection, 'the most tender, un-neurotic and spiritually serene of his songs. Living with them intensively has only increased my love and admiration for Mahler.'



In his interview with James Ehnes for *The Musician and the Score*, **ROB COWAN** was fascinated by the violinist's attitude to the varying textures in the great Solo Sonata. 'Ehnes views Bartók's music from numerous perspectives, but how best to approach what is surely the greatest unaccompanied violin work since Bach?'



'In 1972 in Llandaff Cathedral I sat a few feet away from Boult's left,' says **GERAINT LEWIS**, who this issue considers the conductor's influence on British music. 'I have never forgotten his hawk-eyed control of the orchestra and the hypnotism exerted by his unique use of the baton – all to serve the composer and not himself.'



FOR THE FULL LIST OF
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TURN TO PAGE 43 ►

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Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

And a one, two, three...



What does the waltz mean to you? For most, when listening to its more familiar manifestations – Strauss's *Blue Danube*, for example – it epitomises elegant civility, an untroubled charm and order, gowns and gilded ballrooms, men in tails. The connotations it conjures up – not necessarily wrong but, like most things, coming with a caveat – have offered inspiration to creative minds as diverse as Ravel, Schoenberg and

film director Stanley Kubrick, while the music itself continues to intrigue and fascinate conductors from Nikolaus Harnoncourt to Franz Welser-Möst. All play a part in Philip Clark's engaging exploration of the musical form's history for this month's cover story.

Every year Viennese society – and millions of music lovers worldwide, via the traditional broadcast – gravitate towards the waltz for the annual New Year's Concert. And thus begins another year of music-making. The slightly arbitrary nature of a calendar flipping over doesn't inform musical life as much as many other 'years', be

'Every year Viennese society, and music lovers worldwide, gravitate towards the waltz for the New Year's Concert. Thus begins another year of music-making'

they concert seasons or academic or liturgical ones, but it does usher in the anniversaries and this year is rich in them – Verdi, Wagner and Britten chief among them (though I hope also to hear some additional Dowland and Gesualdo programmed). We begin our own 2013 composer celebrations in this issue with a feature about the Polish composer Witold Lutosławski, born, like Britten, in 1913.

Anniversaries at their most imaginative can encourage an evaluation and advocacy of composers perhaps lesser known or lesser understood. The mighty statures of Verdi and Wagner are secure, though that doesn't mean we shouldn't grab at any extra excuse to revel in their mastery (as we shall certainly be doing in these pages). Britten is a different story: here is the chance, seized upon by the Britten-Pears Foundation and Aldeburgh Music, to make the case once and for

all for the British composer as one of the most important, internationally, of the 20th century. All those who love Britten's music should do everything they can to enthuse, argue and explore over the next 12 months, in the hope that both they and the wider artistic world will, in different ways, gain a better appreciation of his work. See you on the Suffolk coast.

Martin

martin.cullingford@haymarket.com

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January 2013

GRAMOPHONE *Choice*



Informed by our unrivalled panel of critics,
we choose the month's must-hear recordings



Recording of the Month

*'Vinci's reputation
is emphatically
rehabilitated by this
advocacy of Artaserse
masterminded by
Max Emanuel Cencic'*

VINCI

Artaserse

Soloists; Swiss Radio and Television Chorus;

Concerto Köln / Diego Fasolis

Virgin Classics 602869-2

► **DAVID VICKERS'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 44**



BEETHOVEN

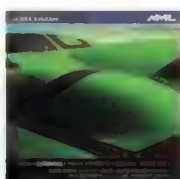
Symphonies Nos 5 & 7

ORR / John Eliot Gardiner

Soli Deo Gloria SDG717

'John Eliot Gardiner and his resplendent Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique rejoice here in the sheer physicality of the music, the bounding rhythms, the stomping accents.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



KNUSSEN

'Autumnal'

Soloists; Birmingham Contemporary Music Group; BBC SO / Oliver Knussen
NMC NMCD178

'There is an edgy blend of lamentation and celebration that is the more affecting for its directness and economy.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



PROKOFIEV

Violin Works

Janine Jansen, Boris Brovtsyn *vns*
Itamar Golan *pf* LPO / Vladimir Jurowski
Decca 478 3546DH

'The highlight of the disc is the First Violin Sonata... Its sombre power is fully revealed in Jansen and Golan's account.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



ELGAR

'The Longed-For Light'

Susan Grillon *sop* Simon Callow *spkr* BBC Concert Orchestra / John Wilson
Somm SOMMCD247

'Wilson's treatment of *Sospiri* (1914) is particularly intoxicating, with some beautifully judged, "old school" string *portamento* worthy of Barbirolli himself.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



FAURÉ Requiem

JS BACH Solo Violin

Partita No 2

Soloists; Tenebrae; LSO Chamber Ensemble / Nigel Short

LSO Live LSO0728

'The performance is elevated into something quite remarkable; I have no hesitation in labelling this the very best Fauré Requiem on disc.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



'PLORER, GEMIR, CRIER'
 'Homage to Johannes Ockeghem'
Diabolus in Musica / Antoine Guerber
 Aeon AECD1226
 'This performance is so well judged that it positively invites repeated listening. The *Credo* is particularly impressive.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



HANDEL
 'Finest Arias for Base Voice'
Christopher Purves *bass*
Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
 Hyperion CDA67842
 'Possessing in effect two voices in one – a ringing, high baritone with a sonorous bass extension – Purves veils his tone to convey bemusement, even pathos.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



'ROMANTIQUE'
 Opera Arias
Elina Garanča *mez*
Bologna Teatro Comunale Philharmonic Orchestra / Yves Abel
 DG 479 0071GH
 "'O mon Fernand!" expresses shame and despair. Garanča sings the slow section with artless simplicity and the cabaletta with passion.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



'NOUVEAU MONDE'
 Baroque Arias and Songs
Patricia Petibon *sop*
Kevin Greenlaw *bar*
La Cetra / Andrea Marcon
 DG 479 0079GH
 "'Nouveau monde" is a tightly thought-through, compelling programme, a *tour de force* for its performer/compiler, most atmospherically recorded.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**

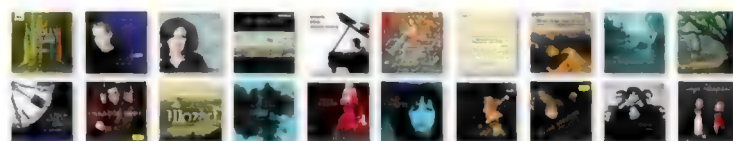


DVD/Blu-ray
PUCCINI
 Tosca
Soloists; Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House / Antonio Pappano; Jonathan Kent *dir*
 EMI Classics DVD 404063-9;
 404064-9
 'The orchestra pit teems with drama as vividly as the stage.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



Reissue/Archive
DEBUSSY
 Pelléas et Mélisande
Soloists; BBC Chorus; Philharmonia Orchestra / Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht
 Testament SBT3 1484
 'Ingelbrecht sculpts a rich, weighty but microscopically balanced reading of the composer's only completed opera.'
 ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**

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David Gutman unveils the playful, deceptive and uplifting music of Bohuslav Martinů that reaches far beyond the six symphonies

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION 92

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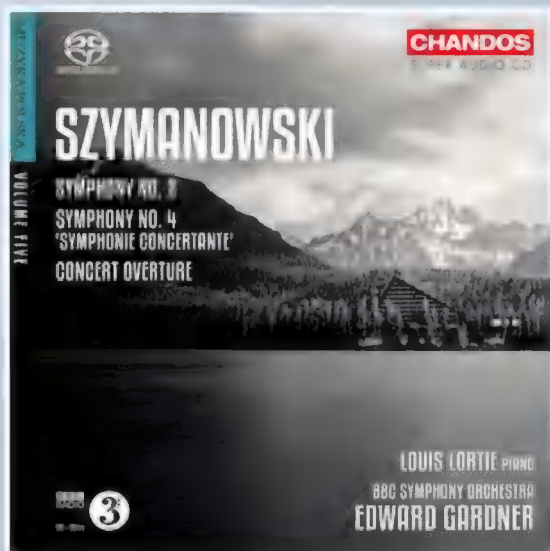
16 All hail Alfred Deller, this month's worthy Icon



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Disc of the Month

Szymanowski

Orchestral Works

With his Lutosławski survey coming to an end, Edward Gardner and the BBC Symphony Orchestra now turn to another of Poland's major composers as part of Chandos' Polish Music series. This is Volume 1 in a new survey of orchestral works by Karol Szymanowski, featuring the Concert Overture and Symphony No. 2, with Louis Lortie the piano soloist in Symphony No. 4.

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Suppé

Overtures and Marches

Franz von Suppé was a successful and highly prolific composer for the stage. A selection of his bright and colourful overtures and marches are performed here by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under Neeme Järvi, who last year celebrated his thirty-year conducting career with Chandos Records.

CHSA 5110



Bartók

Works for Violin and Piano, Vol. 2

James Ehnes has already recorded Béla Bartók's concertos for violin and for viola, to great acclaim. This disc is the second in his equally successful survey of Bartók's chamber music for violin. His accompanist is Andrew Armstrong, a pianist praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique.

CHAN 10752



Petrassi

Psalm IX/Magnificat

Our Italian Music series with the conductor Gianandrea Noseda continues with two large-scale choral works by Goffredo Petrassi, Psalm IX and the premiere recording of the Magnificat, performed by the Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro Regio, Torino.

CHAN 10750



Mozart, Copland, and Kats-Chernin

Works for Clarinet and Orchestra

Michael Collins combines the roles of clarinet soloist and conductor of the Swedish Chamber Orchestra in three works that chart the journey of the clarinet, from Mozart's late-eighteenth-century Europe, via Aaron Copland's 1940s America, to a recent piece, written for Michael Collins, by the Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin.

CHAN 10756



Daniel Purcell

Sonatas for violin and continuo

Here we have a selection of works for solo harpsichord and for violin and continuo by Daniel Purcell, the younger brother (or more likely cousin) of Henry Purcell. Most of the works are recorded here for the first time, and performed by the violinist Hazel Brooks and harpsichordist David Pollock.

CHAN 0795

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interpretation by the
Swedish soprano
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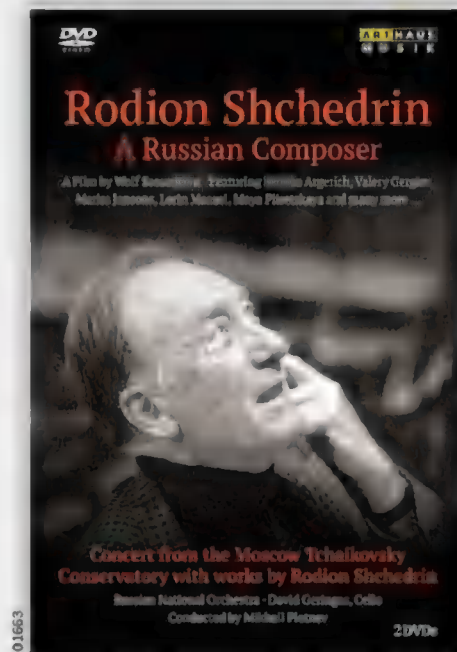
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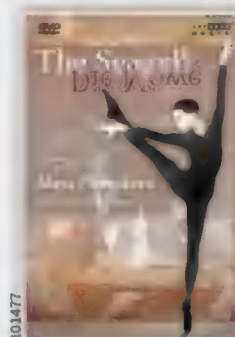
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Rodion Shchedrin

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PODCASTS

This month in our free podcast series, James Jolly talks to Stephen Wright, the chairman of ICA Classics, about uncovering long lost recordings and the allure of the great artists of the past.

NEWS AND FEATURES

The *Gramophone* Composer Guide series continues with recommended recordings of all the major works by Rachmaninov (pictured) and Tchaikovsky. Previous features – all still accessible – focus on Britten, Bach and Mozart and many others.

THE GRAMOPHONE PLAYER

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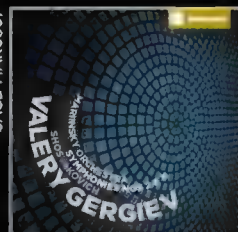


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CHOC
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PRELUDES

On music, on musicians, on record

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Where
Merton College, Oxford

The details
The Tallis Scholars
directed by Peter Phillips
perform in Merton College
Chapel on March 1, 1980

The Tallis Scholars, 40 years on

The haircuts and outfits may have changed since the early days, but the Tallis Scholars are as committed today to musical excellence as when they were founded by Peter Phillips in 1973. The Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble launch their 40th anniversary world tour with Tallis's *Sper in alium* at St Paul's Cathedral on March 7 (visit barbican.org.uk/tallisscholars); their recording of the work has been topping classical charts thanks to the popularity of the novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*, in which it features. The group are pictured here in 1980 – keen observers will recognise countertenor Michael Chance (far right) – at Merton College Chapel, Oxford, where they've made many of their recordings (and where Phillips recently set up a choral foundation). It feels a long way from blockbuster novels, but for Phillips it is only natural that after 40 years of performing 'one of the most remarkable achievements of the human mind', *Sper in alium* has found 'such a large new audience'.

Tony Hall's new role ensures the BBC gains a director with a passion for classical music

Given the BBC's troubles in recent months, the task of heading the organisation may appear more than a little daunting – especially given the departure of two directors general. Not so for Tony Hall, current chief executive of the Royal Opera House, who has been appointed the corporation's new director general from March 2013.

Hall – or, more correctly, Baron Hall of Birkenhead, following his award of a life peerage in 2010 – took over at Covent Garden in 2001, following a career at the BBC which culminated in his being made head of BBC News. He leaves a Royal Opera House that has been consistently achieving highly acclaimed artistic standards, not least under the baton of its music director Sir Antonio Pappano, who himself joined Covent Garden shortly after Hall, in 2002.

Hall's time in charge has also seen an expansion of outreach activities, such as broadcasts to outside big screens and the purchase of the DVD label Opus Arte, recipient of several DVD of the Month accolades from *Gramophone*. He also oversaw the 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

'Tony has been the most wonderful advocate for both the Royal Opera House and opera more generally,' said Pappano. 'He has grabbed every opportunity to enable us to get opera way beyond the Opera House auditorium into homes and cinemas around the

'Hall leaves a Royal Opera House that has been consistently achieving highly acclaimed artistic standards'

world. He's been a great friend and colleague and whilst this is a fantastic opportunity for him to return to the BBC – and I can think of no better person for the BBC – we will miss him hugely here.'

With such a glowing track record it is little wonder Hall has been called upon to restore the badly damaged reputation of the BBC and it is indeed heartening to know that one of the world's most senior broadcasting roles is to be held by someone with a personal passion for classical music. As for the Royal Opera House, the company is already searching for a suitable replacement – a task which itself cannot be easy following such a successful predecessor.

Marathon concert sessions seem to be all the rage, with not one but two 12-hour extravaganzas appearing on the radar of late. First up was a dozen hours of Beethoven, presented at Berlin's Konzerthaus in honour of the Konzerthaus Orchestra's new chief conductor, Iván Fischer. Complete with bold pink posters proclaiming 'Ready, Set, Beethoven', the 35 condensed performances, running from 11am to 11pm on November 10, certainly managed to raise awareness in a city where seven symphony orchestras and three opera companies jostle for audience attention.

Running the gamut of Beethoven's output – from piano sonatas to Lieder to symphonies – the day was clearly designed as a new approach to programming. 'We have a word in Berlin, *Kulturnomad* (cultural nomad): a specific group of people who are generally interested in culture,' explained Intendant Sebastian Nordmann.



'In one week, they go from an exhibition to a classical concert to a Bruce Springsteen concert in a big stadium. To attract the *Kulturnomaden*, we need to have a special idea. They probably wouldn't come to a normal subscription concert.' By all accounts the experiment worked and Fischer now plans to make the composer marathon an annual tradition: 'I have another nine or 10 composers in mind for the future,' he said.

It will be interesting, then, to see how well the idea translates across the Channel when Sir John Eliot Gardiner presents his own 12-hour Bach marathon in celebration of his 70th birthday on April 1, 2013. Held at London's Royal Albert Hall, the Easter Monday event will open and conclude with Gardiner conducting his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists in the *St John Passion* and B minor Mass. Also taking part will be the violinist Viktoria Mullova in Bach's D minor Chaconne, Alban Gerhardt in the Sixth Cello Suite, organist Cameron Carpenter, and Robert Levin conducting the Britten Sinfonia. The day's 12 events will be broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Prizes for classical music tend to be comparatively modest affairs, more likely to offer prestige and performance opportunities than grand financial rewards. The Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, granted through the University of Louisville, is one of the few exceptions, however, providing \$100,000 for the winner.

In November, the 2013 prize was awarded to the Dutch composer Michel van der Aa for his 30-minute work *Up-Close*. Written for virtuoso cello, string ensemble and film, the piece was premiered by Sol Gabetta and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta in Stockholm in 2011. The film – an integral aspect of the work – depicts an elderly woman, who tries to communicate through a mechanical coding device and whose actions become increasingly linked to the music onstage. Van der Aa's label Disquiet Media released the work on DVD last year, and it was named *Gramophone's* DVD of the Month in the April 2012 issue.

Grawemeyer prizes are also granted to individuals working in Education, World Order, Psychology and Religion and may be awarded as often as once a year. ©

MUSICIAN'S DIARY

Christopher Purves

The bass – and former member of Harvey and the Wallbangers – on singers' trials and triumphs and his new disc of Handel arias

Dad, are you around this weekend for my game against WBA Academy? Dad, can you come to the Banbury hockey tournament on Sunday? Dad, are you coming to Paris for the Street Dance Championships in April? All legitimate questions from each of my kids – after all, it was partly me who had encouraged them to try out these activities and, to a large degree, excel at them. And yet every time I hear the requests, my heart breaks into pieces all over again as I have to tell the kids that, alas, I have to prepare for a first night, I have to be away, I have a rehearsal, etc etc. Sometimes you just have to be careful, not exert yourself too much, cover yourself in cotton wool, keep away from germs...

It has to be said that my idea of heaven is to be able to do the fantastic job I do but to do it somewhere near home so that I can go to footie/hockey/dance. I simply can't imagine anything better than shouting from the touchline and watching my young man, Patrick, weave his way through tackles to thread the killer pass. Or being there to watch my little man, Ted, scorch a penalty corner into the top right corner of the hockey goal, or to watch my daughter, Lily, dance a routine with her troupe which is so precise, so full of energy, so full of the stuff that makes Lily such a force of nature. That's what I want; maybe it's something that my non-musician friends take for granted, those Sunday mornings passing on their own passion for sport or dance, or painting.

I wouldn't want to paint a false picture of unhappiness and despondency – far from it. There are some occasions when I know I wouldn't want to be anywhere else than a rehearsal room or concert platform or the stage. The occasion when we sang and played through George Benjamin's new masterpiece, *Written on Skin*, with the incomparable Mahler Chamber Orchestra was one such. The sound world that this one, albeit brilliant, man had created was truly awe-inspiring, so utterly unique, that even the hardest of us all were reduced to tears. To witness at first hand the incredible genius of the orchestral players as they swooped and

'In the mind of a singer it's easy to go from zero to worst-case scenario'

scaled the demanding writing as though it really was a walk in the park was so humbling. I think a lot of us 'turns' don't really give the orchestra enough credit for allowing us to perform unhindered, for allowing the conductor to be ours when we need him/her. It is that collaborative aspect of performing that interests me the most and gives me so much joy that I keep coming back for more, even when there's a dance competition in Paris to attend!



In the cans: listening to playback during the recording of Handel arias



My beautiful wife and kids: their various activities cause me all kinds of dilemmas



Written on skin: George Benjamin in the palm of my hand

When making my CD of Handel bass arias with Arcangelo, I encountered all those problems that haunt a singer's life, namely loss of confidence, voice and control of vocal production. Starting the second day's recording I knew something wasn't quite right; and in the mind of a singer it's so easy to go from zero to worst-case scenario in the twinkling of an eye. The outcome was that I couldn't continue that day and would have to come back on Monday, having lost two sessions – about a third of the recording time – with some incredibly demanding arias still to record. We had no slack to play with and the Arcangelo orchestral management team went into overdrive to resurrect a project that looked like it might be unravelling before their very eyes. The players consulted their diary services, I made an emotional plea for their continued patience and Jonny Cohen, the conductor of this wonderful group of soloists, galvanised performances from them that I still find so incredibly touching even though I've heard them thousands of times. Maybe it was a case on this occasion of 'There but for the grace of God go we all', I don't know; or perhaps it was the rather pathetic figure of myself, who hitherto had been acting out the God-like jealous rages of Polyphemus, reduced to tears in front of them. I will perhaps never know the real reason but all I can admit is that saying to my long-suffering wife, Edwina, who is my rock and my wonderful support in everything I do, and to my beautiful kids 'Sorry, I have to be away/at rehearsal/in the recording studio' is made a lot easier when there are moments like these. **Q**

► To read Gramophone's review of Christopher Purves's Handel, turn to page 77



SESSION REPORT Villazón records Verdi

Work *Verdi arias and songs* Artists *Rolando Villazón (tenor), Orchestra of the Teatro Regio Turin* Venue *RAI Toscanini Auditorium, Turin*
 Conductor *Gianandrea Noseda* Producers *Sid McLauchlan and David Groves*
 Engineer *Rainer Maillard* Date of session *September 30, 2012* Words *Richard Lawrence*

The end of September found me in Turin, a pleasant city laid out on a grid pattern with arcades to protect strollers and shoppers from the elements. Having recently reviewed Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmira* (12/12), I was hoping to see Tiepolo's painting *The Triumph of Aureliano* in the Sabauda gallery. But the collection has been moved while the building is being renovated, and *Aureliano* was in store. I was disappointed, but all the rebuilding going on is an indication of the prosperity of the city.

The recording was taking place at the RAI Toscanini Auditorium, a full-blown concert hall with stalls of red plush, two horseshoe balconies and an array of organ pipes above the stage. The orchestra didn't belong to RAI, the broadcasting organisation, but to Turin's opera house, the Teatro Regio. This was the last session, a Sunday afternoon, and there was an air of relaxation and jollity at the start, the orchestra bursting into an improvised performance of 'Happy Birthday' for one of the trombone players. Once the red light came on, though, the discipline and concentration were palpable. The first part of the session was devoted to 'patching': a retake of the beginning of 'L'esule' ('The Exile') – a song orchestrated by Berio. The liquid sound of flute and clarinet in octaves made a perfect introduction to Rolando Villazón's entry with 'Vedi la bianca luna'.

Then it was on to 'Ingemisco', the tenor solo in the *Dies irae* of the Requiem. After the first take, conductor and soloist,

plus a few hangers-on, trooped into the control room where the producers and engineer, out of sight of the performers, could watch proceedings on a television monitor. It was immediately decided to end the aria on a sustained chord rather than with the repeated figure that leads to 'Confutatis maledictis'. A couple more takes, and the piece was in the bag. After the break there was more patching, this time of the scene from *Un ballo in maschera*: Sid McLauchlan, the Canadian producer of the recording, was as punctilious here about the synchronisation of voice and orchestra as he had been earlier about intonation. Suddenly it was all over, the orchestra doubtless delighted to be released early.

I asked Gianandrea Noseda whether the orchestra had much opportunity to get out of the pit to make recordings. 'The first thing I tried to achieve after becoming music director of the

'The Teatro Regio orchestra feel Verdi in their blood. And nobody makes the orchestra cry like Verdi'

– Rolando Villazón



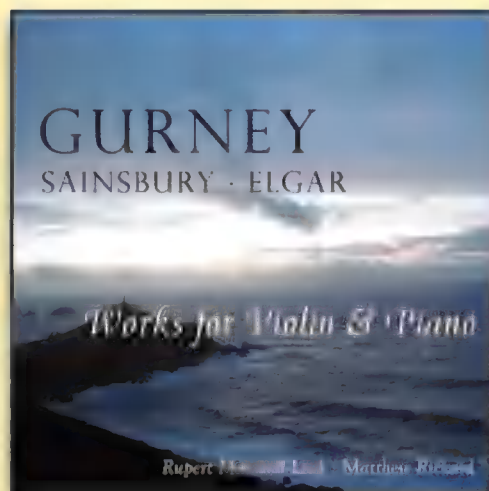
1 Rolando Villazón, Gianandrea Noseda and the Teatro Regio orchestra get to the heart of Verdi's 'emotional, dramatic, beautiful' music
2 Villazón's boundless enthusiasm appears to have rubbed off on Noseda

Teatro Regio in 2007 was to increase concert activity. Last year we opened the season with a cycle of Beethoven symphonies and we are now doing 11 concerts each year, so the orchestra is more used to being on stage. Along with this, we've started to increase recording activity, which is another important area for a modern orchestra. We are about to make a recording with Anna Netrebko, and we have recently recorded orchestral works by Mascagni and choral works by Pettrassi. Another important activity is touring, for example we took *La bohème* and *Tosca* to Japan in 2010, and give an annual concert performance (our next, in April, is *Don Carlo*) at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. It's also important to go beyond the Italian repertoire: in a few days' time we will open the new season here with *The Flying Dutchman*.

According to Noseda, the idea for this Verdi recital came up when conductor and soloist were on tour in Tokyo with the Metropolitan Opera. A staged production in Turin was not feasible, but what about a CD to mark the Verdi bicentenary? Villazón is emphatic that this is not just a collection of arias but a journey from Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, to his last tenor aria, Fenton's 'Dal labbro' in *Falstaff*, taking in three of his songs and the Requiem along the way. 'I spent hours and hours deciding what to include – the *brindisi* from *La traviata*, 'La donna è mobile' from *Rigoletto*? In the end, I said we should have some arias that people will recognise and a nice selection of things that they are not familiar with: *Oberto*, *Il corsaro*, *I due Foscari* – the aria from *Il corsaro* is a jewel, it's like chamber music, and it's emotional, dramatic, beautiful.'

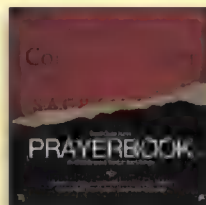
In Villazón's view, Verdi is a paradox of simplicity and complexity. 'He was an extremely accomplished composer, and yet he always chose to reach every person. He wrote from the human heart to the human heart,' Villazón adds, in a perhaps unconscious reference to Beethoven's superscription to the *Missa solennis*. The singer is full of praise for the Teatro Regio orchestra. 'They feel Verdi in their blood, and as a singer you have to listen all the time. The emotions are portrayed by the orchestra: joy, jealousy, love – and nobody makes the orchestra cry like Verdi.'

Villazón has more to say about Verdi's simplicity, and the words tumble out owing to his beguiling, rather Tiggerish enthusiasm. As for recording, he doesn't think of the microphone, but rather of trying to touch people, whether they are listening at home or in their car. And he repeats: 'This CD has been very carefully planned. The star has to be, and is, Verdi.' **G**



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Alfred Deller

Richard Wigmore pays tribute to the pioneering singer who revived the countertenor voice

When Michael Tippett first heard Alfred Deller singing Purcell's 'Music for a while' in Canterbury Cathedral in 1942 he felt 'the centuries roll back'. Here was a type of voice long thought extinct: a full, pure, flexible male alto, light years away from the pallid and/or squawky altos who usually inhabited cathedral choir stalls. Tippett, then at the forefront of the Purcell revival, immediately sensed that Deller's was exactly the kind of voice the composer envisaged. Having at last found an alto to do justice to Purcell's grandly ornate lines, he programmed the Ode *Hail! bright Cecilia* for Deller's professional concert debut, on New Year's Eve 1944. At the relatively advanced age of 32 the Canterbury lay clerk was on his way.

'England's very own voice' was how one obituary described Deller. The accolade was true in the sense that he was responsible almost single-handedly for restoring the male alto, or countertenor (the terms are interchangeable) voice to the status it had enjoyed three and four centuries earlier. By reviving the characteristically English art of falsetto singing, Deller also played a crucial role in the rediscovery of reams of Elizabethan and Jacobean music, and of Purcell, the composer closest to his heart. His successors, from Paul Esswood and James Bowman to Michael Chance and Andreas Scholl, have all acknowledged their debt to Deller. Esswood cites not only the beauty of his voice but 'his totally new concept of interpreting a phrase': with a freedom and fantasy that took many early listeners aback.


Deller was rare among great singers in being completely self-taught. He was born in Margate on May 31, 1912, by ironic coincidence within weeks of the birth of contralto Kathleen Ferrier, the last great representative of an English species which the countertenor revival all but killed off. Deller's father was an army sergeant turned PE instructor who ran his large family rather like a parade ground. But on his own admission Alfred did acquire two vital things from his father: an imposing physique, with a broad chest and capacious lungs; and a strong sense of rhythm, learnt from watching his father take gym classes.

Deller left school at 15 for a career in the furniture trade. When he moved round the Kent coast to Hastings in 1932, he joined the then famous choir of Christ Church, St Leonard's, and fell in love with his employer's daughter, Peggy Lowe. Despite her mother's opposition to a man who produced strange and suspect falsetto sounds (even in his years of his fame he suffered from prejudice and furtive audience sniggers), the couple married in 1937. Two years later he became a lay clerk in Canterbury; and as a lifelong pacifist he spent the war years combining singing duties with work on a Quaker farm.

After his 'discovery' by Tippett, Deller sang in Purcell's *Come, ye Sons of Art* for the inaugural concert of the BBC Third Programme in 1946. Always happy in the choir stalls (he remained a lay clerk into his fifties), he moved from Canterbury to St Paul's Cathedral the following year, and in 1950 founded the Deller Consort. From his debut 78 disc of Purcell, he recorded prolifically: lute songs and English folksongs with Desmond Dupré (and, later, Robert Spencer), Purcell songs and Odes, Bach cantatas with Leonhardt (no one has floated the opening

lullaby of No 170, 'Vergnügte Ruh' more exquisitely), madrigals and *a cappella* sacred music with the Deller Consort.

In English folksong Deller revealed the wit and timing of a born storyteller. Yet unlike most of his successors, he sang little opera. His was an essentially intimate, reflective art; and his one major operatic appearance, as Oberon in the 1960 Aldeburgh premiere of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was a mixed success. Critics praised his singing while going to town on the deficiencies of his acting. For the planned Covent Garden performances Solti cast American countertenor Russell Oberlin. Deller, always prone to insecurity and depression, was devastated – though in partial compensation Britten did insist on Deller for his 1966 recording of the opera.

By the late 1960s Deller's voice had grown darker, deeper and a shade less pliable than before; but his gift for penetrating the essence of a song remained undiminished: say, in the Dowland lute songs he recorded with Robert Spencer in 1977. By this time he was suffering from angina, yet barely eased up. When he died of a heart attack in Bologna on July 16, 1979, the news was announced to a clip of 'Music for a while'. Obituaries paid homage not only to his artistry, his gift for burning a phrase into the memory, but also to his part in reviving a lost tradition. Perhaps the most moving tribute came, aptly, from Michael Tippett. Recalling that TV clip of 'Music for a while', he wrote: 'A poignant emotion indeed, to be comforted in the moment of grief by the man himself, though already passed out of life. The voice, as always, had its own inviolable purity. It sounded so gentle, so alone, as to be almost frail. But a frailty, certainly a purity, that is also a strength; some quintessence, surely, of our great and mutual art.' 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Alfred Deller: HMV Recordings 1949-1954
With Desmond Dupré, Walter Bergmann and other artists
 EMI Références © 565 501-2

DEFINING MOMENTS

• December 1944 – Professional solo debut

Makes his professional solo debut in Purcell's *Hail! bright Cecilia*, at the Friends' House in London's Euston Road

• March 1949 – First 78 recording

Records his first 78: Purcell's 'Music for a while', sung with inimitable delicacy, and 'If music be the food of love'

• 1962 – Founds Stour Music

The year he founded the Stour Music Festival in Kent, one of the world's first festivals devoted to Renaissance and Baroque music

*A type of voice
long thought
extinct: a pure,
full, flexible
male alto'*



Flying solo

Rob Cowan talks to violinist *James Ehnes* about the demands of Bartók's Solo Violin Sonata

James Ehnes joins me over coffee to discuss one of his abiding passions, the music of Béla Bartók. Ehnes and Bartók share at least two characteristics, a quiet manner and a caring though not over-literal respect for the letter of the score. How does he square his sensitive musical instincts with the indications on the printed page? Just suppose that the two don't tally. Ehnes is unequivocal: 'There's always a reason why an indication is there,' he tells me. 'If I can't justify my interpretation as being the best way of bringing those indications to life, then I feel I'm missing something crucial enough that I maybe need to take a little more time to figure things out.' He sees the score as a roadmap for getting to a specific musical destination and confirms that different composers use notation in very different ways. He says that if you take an approach that's both too literal and too consistent, you can end up getting yourself into trouble. So 'tempered freedom' might be his credo.

Ehnes's latest recording opens with one of the cornerstones of the 20th-century violin repertoire, Bartók's Solo Violin Sonata, written to a wartime commission from Yehudi Menuhin. He's fascinated by various extant textual sources, including the original manuscript, emendations that Bartók and Menuhin cooked up between them, and Peter Bartók's Urtext of 1994 (published by Boosey & Hawkes).

We leaf through this Urtext, looking at where – in the closing *Presto* – passages involving quartertones are printed beneath the less colouristic alternatives, 'colour' being Bartók's primary reason for using quartertones in the first place. But some of the most striking chordal

'If your hand isn't really strong then it starts to create accidental harmonics, a kind of whistling' – James Ehnes

passages are in the other movements, for example bar 44 in the first movement (2'49" into track one), which is one of those instances where if you play it the way it's written you basically have to forget what you've been told about concepts of hand shape and traditional technique.

Getting your head around bars 40–42 (2'35"–2'45"), really hearing those harmonies and intervals clearly – that's another challenge. From a purely violinistic standpoint, Ehnes has learnt so much by playing this piece. Take for example the trills in bar 83 of the fugue (3'12" into track two): here he had to contort the hand in a way that's pretty uncomfortable but that proved useful when later on he was playing solo Bach and needed to use the same type of hand contortion. The



James Ehnes: mastering Bartók

educating process of recording Bartók over the last few years has revealed to Ehnes many passages of extraordinary delicacy, 'and to be honest, that's where you sink or swim. A lot of the swashbuckling Bartók will work just great, guaranteed. It's hard to mess up the *Romanian Folk Dances*. But a movement such as the *Melodia* from the Solo Violin Sonata or the slow movement of the First Violin Sonata should draw the listener into a world that's so personal as to be even a little uncomfortable. That for me is the real challenge of a movement like this...and certainly the *Melodia*'s middle section [*poco più andante*, 3'06" into track three] is technically very uncomfortable for the hand. With many of these *tremolos*, particularly the wider ones, if your hand isn't really strong then it starts to create accidental harmonics, a kind of whistling – weird and...unsuccessful.'

The CD includes Hungarian and Romanian folksong arrangements, 'entry-level, user-friendly Bartók', says Ehnes, 'pizza-pieces – meaning that even when they're bad they're still pretty good! Some kid in a competition performs them and gets everyone all fired up, even if they're not especially well played.' An amusing thought, though not one that Ehnes's playing will prompt. That much I can guarantee. **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 60



The historical view

Malcolm Gillies

The Bartók Companion (1993)

'While in Asheville, North Carolina in 1944, Bartók allowed the experience of Menuhin's Bach performance [C major Sonata, BWV1005] to mingle with his own compositional ideas...The fugue from the Sonata for Solo Violin was Bartók's ultimate offering as a contrapuntalist.'

Yehudi Menuhin

Menuhin: A Life (Humphrey Burton, 2000)

'I regret that I was not able to let him [Bartók] hear it in a truly finished interpretation, for over the years the music has come to speak to me, and I believe all of us, in the deepest musical terms...[The fugue] was perhaps the most aggressive, brutal music I was ever to play.'

Béla Bartók to Menuhin

Unfinished Journey (Yehudi Menuhin, 2001)

'I am rather worried about the "playability" of some of the double-stops, etc. On the last page I give you some of the alternatives. I sent you two copies. Would you introduce in one of them the necessary changes in bowing... and also indicate the impracticable difficulties? I would try to change them.'

QUIZ



I inspired the opera whose heroine is depicted here

Who am I?

Pit your wits against Gramophone

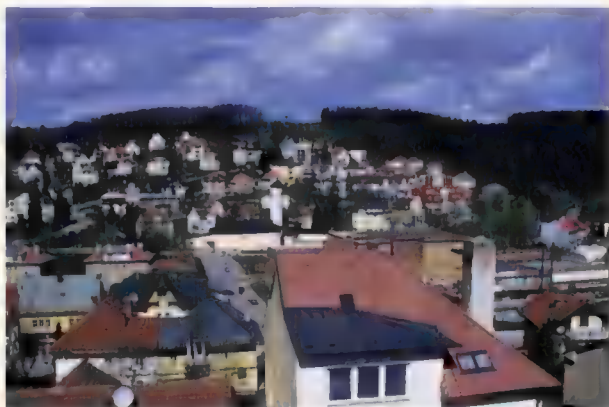
The wife of an antique dealer frequently away from home, I tiptoed into musical history via an unusual route.

On holiday in a spa resort, I met a famous composer. He was married. So was I. We struck up a friendship and, after the holiday, he began writing to me.

Undeterred by my lack of interest in his work, my sporadic replies or the fact that he was almost 40 years older than me, he became obsessed with me.

We maintained contact until his death 11 years later. I was even with him when he caught his fatal chill. And yet, in all that time, my feelings for him were never made clear.

In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, I am the inspiration behind the lead characters in no less than three of his operas and a chamber work which takes its name from the more than 700 letters he wrote to me over the course of a decade.



In this spa town, I met the composer who was to become obsessed with me

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— Robert E. McQuiston (Classical Lost and Found)

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— John France (MusicWeb)

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— Jean-Yves Dupont (Classical Music Business)

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NOTES & LETTERS

Neeme Järvi's Scottish years • Dvořák's Cypresses on strings and in song • Ives's ethos

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Toscanini on tape

I wish to thank Rob Cowan for his excellent review of the box-set of recordings of Arturo Toscanini (Awards, page 120). His précis was superb and presented new light upon Toscanini's interpretation of certain composers, particularly Schubert.

I have in my collection 20-year-old VHS tapes of the NBC SO under Toscanini with the label attachment of RCA Victor Gold Seal, dedicated to NBC live recordings of various composers. This set of tapes also includes an appendix, now transferred on to DVD, 'Toscanini: The Maestro'. It would be a welcome addition to the new box-set if RCA would transfer these tapes on to DVD. Given the superb transfers that have occurred with the CDs, one can only live in hope.

Mike Leigh

Wollaton, Nottingham

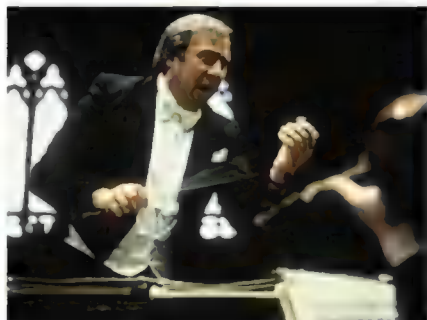
Biting the hand that fed?

I was really quite angry at Neeme Järvi's assertion that 'I can do much better work now than I did 20 or 30 years ago, because...I have better orchestras' (December, page 30). Oh really, Mr Järvi?! During this period in his career he was principally conducting the (R)SNO, with which he established his credentials and won numerous awards that in turn led to the furthering of his professional development. This was in no small part due to the sheer hard work of this orchestra which enabled him to make many recordings for Chandos on minimal rehearsal time.

It's interesting that recordings made by 'better' orchestras failed to reap the acclaim that his work with the (R)SNO garnered and the concluding remarks smack of biting the hand that fed him. Shame on you, Mr Järvi!

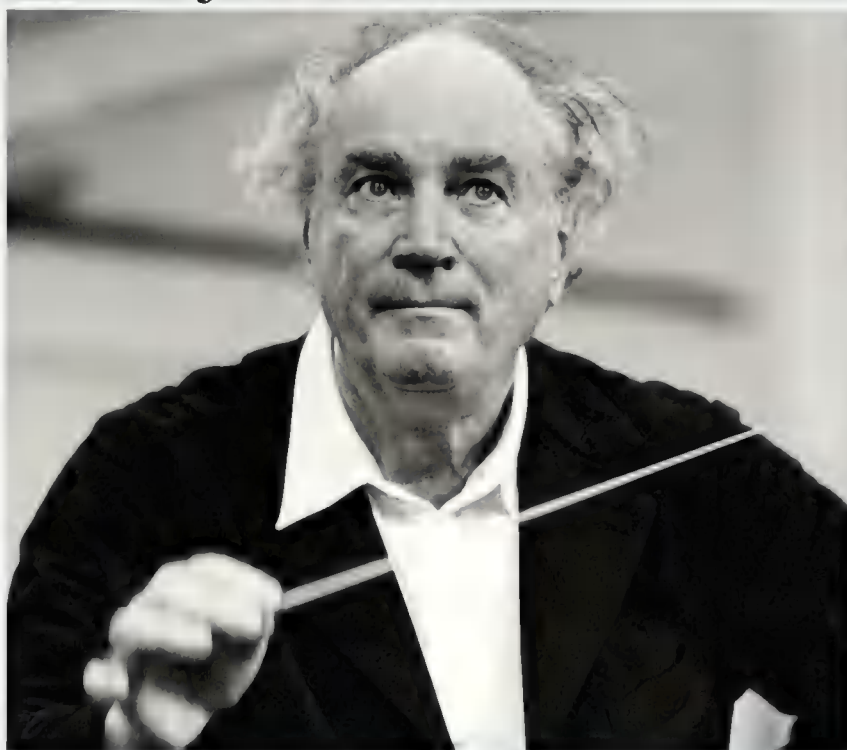
Robert Roy

Edinburgh, UK



Neeme Järvi: a Scottish start

Letter of the Month



Hair-raising: Rafael Kubelík in 1982

Kubelík the communicator

I was bemused by Gavin Dixon's choice of Pfitzner's *Palestrina* as 'the essential' Kubelík recording (Icons, November, page 20), though it is a fascinating document of a work which was much less fashionable when he recorded it than it is today, and with an incredible cast. What is really scandalous is that Kubelík's unsurpassed Beethoven symphony cycle has never been available on CD outside Japan.

Kubelík heard live was an almost hair-raising experience. Following his concert cycle of Brahms symphonies with the LSO in London in 1983, the Orfeo live recording with the BRSO the previous month was a great disappointment:

it seemed edited out of existence and sonically flat. I sometimes wonder whether Bavarian Radio have anything more representative surviving in their archive.

It ought to be mentioned that there was one important sense in which Kubelík was not 'a born collaborator'. Before his exile from communist Czechoslovakia he had to go into hiding from the Nazis, having refused to give a Hitler salute to Reichsprotektor Karl Hermann Frank in his position as director of the Czech Philharmonic (he also refused to conduct Wagner while the occupation continued).

John Stone

London N22, UK

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the February issue by January 4. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

PRESTO
CLASSICAL

Hänssler's second Cypresses

According to Hänssler Classic, its new disc of Dvořák's *Cypresses* song-cycle coupled with the *Cypresses* string quartet (review, November, page 74) is the first-ever recording to have them together. Somm was actually the first label to record and release the two together as long ago as 2004! The 18 songs were recorded by tenor Timothy Robinson accompanied by Graham Johnson, while the string quartet version was recorded by the Delmé Quartet.

*Siva Oke, Somm Recordings
Thames Ditton, Surrey, UK*

Beatle drive

Jack Kerouac's 'open-ended and cyclical' symbolism of a road travelled also being a new beginning, echoed in the formal gestures of Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata* (Collection, November, page 92), was expressed in song some 80 years later by George Harrison in 'Any Road'. Struggling with the inevitability of his pending fate, he wrote: 'I keep travelling around a bend, there was no beginning there is no end, it wasn't born and never dies, there are no edges, there is no sides.' He concludes, bringing Ives and Kerouac's ethos full circle: 'If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.'

Barry Borman, via email

Editorial Comments

The Opus Arte/Katharina Wagner *Meistersinger* cited by Mike Ashman in his Glyndebourne DVD review (December, page 89) is conducted not by Christian Thielemann but by Sebastian Weigle.

In our concert listings (November, page 101), we mistakenly used a picture of Zubin Mehta instead of De Waart as captioned.

Due to an editorial slip-up, Richard Wigmore's entry for 'Critics' Choice' (December) was missed off – so here it is. Apologies, Richard!

Schubert Schwanengesang, D957

Mark Padmore *ten* Paul Lewis *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7520 (A/11)



No recording of Schubert's posthumously published non-cycle has moved me more than this, the fruit of a long-standing creative partnership.

Padmore's plangent, silvery tenor is ideal for the water music of 'Liebesbotschaft' and the breezy nonchalance, tinged with regret, of 'Abschied'. He and the ever-discerning Lewis then rise magnificently to the challenge of the visionary Heine settings, culminating in a 'Doppelgänger' of appalling emotional truth.

OBITUARIES

King's College's conductor, a multiple-piano composer, Karajan's leader and a much-admired producer

SIR PHILIP LEDGER

Conductor, composer and keyboardist

Born December 12, 1937

Died November 18, 2012

Sir Philip Ledger, conductor, organist and for many years director of music at King's College, Cambridge, and subsequently principal of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, has died aged 74.

Ledger studied at King's and in 1962 was appointed master of music at Chelmsford Cathedral. He was director of music at the University of East Anglia, 1965-73, and shortly afterwards became an artistic director to the Aldeburgh Festival, working closely with Britten. Taking up the post at King's in 1974, he succeeded Sir David Willcocks – director of music there since 1957 – whom he once described as the strongest influence in his musical development. In 1982 he took up his next post, which he held until retirement in 2001, as principal of the RSAMD. He was thus an acclaimed choral conductor, educator and conductor – but also a superb pianist too, *Gramophone* once writing that 'he is as happy playing Schubert's *Winterreise* as conducting the King's choir'. One of his longest musical relationships was with the tenor Robert Tear; they had studied together at King's and Tear was Ledger's best man.

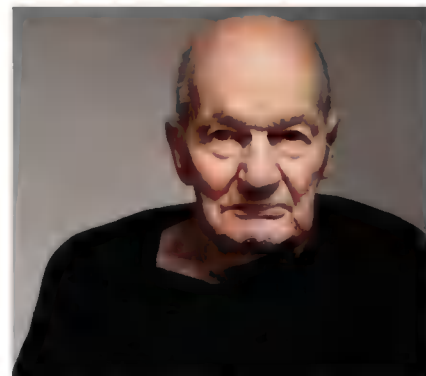
A disc of his music was released by Regent Records in 2010, performed by the choir of Christ's College, Cambridge, of which *Gramophone* wrote: 'Ledger is content to explore simple yet thoroughly memorable melody and harmony in uncomplicated stanzaic structures. Yet, under the surface, lies a skilful legerdemain.'

Philip Ledger's discography, largely for EMI, was extensive and ranged widely across the centuries. He was knighted in 1999.

Martin Cullingford



Sir Philip Ledger: King's College director of music



Simeon ten Holt: ■ minimalist maximalist

SIMEON TEN HOLT

Composer

Born January 24, 1923

Died November 25, 2012

Best known for creating large-scale minimalist multiple piano works, the Dutch composer Simeon ten Holt died in hospital in Alkmaar on November 25, aged 89.

Born in Bergen, North Holland, in 1923, Ten Holt first studied piano and theory with Jakob van Domselaer. In 1949 he moved to Paris and studied at the Ecole Normale with Honegger and Milhaud before moving back to Bergen, where he founded the Werkgroep Bergen Hedendaagse Muziek. Ten Holt's earlier creative endeavours embraced serialism, electronic media, theatre and improvisation. In the late 1970s he evolved a style featuring simple chords, shifting rhythmic patterns and repetition that achieved a hypnotic, multi-layered cumulative effect. *Canto ostinato* (1976-79) is the first and arguably best known of Ten Holt's keyboard works in this style, and surely the most frequently performed. The composer designated its ideal performance option for four equal-sized grand pianos, although any number of keyboards can participate. The notes themselves are set, yet performers largely determine the dynamics, phrasing, register, articulations, alternative passages when given, and the number of repeats. As a result, a performance has no predetermined duration. Indeed, another multiple-piano work in this style, *Lemmiscaat* (1983), lasted 30 hours at its premiere.

The musical vocabulary can be as static as early Philip Glass, yet also embrace the harmonic intricacies and big tunes of late Romanticism, along with unexpected dramatic build-ups and sudden silences. And, despite the modular nature of Ten Holt's methods, the music always sounds fluid, interactive and in constant flux. As the composer wrote in 1995: 'I have no idea of the next port to which my compass is set.'

Jed Distler

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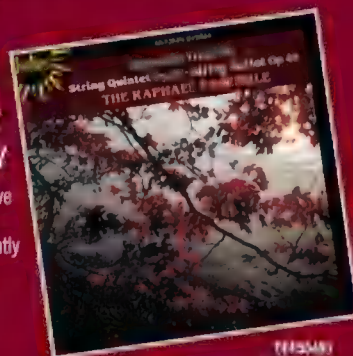
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MICHEL SCHWALBÉ

Violinist

Born October 27, 1919

Died October 9, 2012

The Polish-born violinist Michel Schwalbé has died at the age of 92.

By a sad coincidence I had just been listening to Michel Schwalbé's distinctive and warm-hearted recording of Bach's Double Violin Concerto with Christian Ferras and the Berlin Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan (soon available as part of 'L'art de Christian Ferras' from Discovery Records – see page 89) when I learnt of Schwalbé's death in Berlin on October 9, shortly before his 93rd birthday. He was born in 1919, received his first violin lessons at the age of eight from Maurycy Frenkel in Warsaw and from 1933 studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Georges Enescu, Jules Boucherit and Pierre Monteux.

The fact that in 1957 Karajan offered him the position of concertmaster at the Berlin Philharmonic (a post that, as a Polish-born Jew, Schwalbé was initially wary of accepting) must at the time have seemed like a much-valued gesture of reconciliation, especially when considering Karajan's respected position within Nazi Germany. But this gifted Enescu pupil, quartet leader and one-time concertmaster of Ernest Ansermet's Suisse Romande Orchestra was to prove a great credit to the orchestra and was also extremely adept at solo work. His various recordings include versions of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* and Strauss's tone-poem *Ein Heldenleben* under Karajan (one of the best versions of Strauss's taxing fiddle solo ever) and he remained in situ at the BPO until 1986.

Schwalbé taught as a professor at the Hanns Eisler Academy of Music in Berlin and after his retirement was much in demand as a jury member, teacher and advisor to young violinists. He was a model concertmaster, technically assured, tonally alluring and yet, appropriately and effectively, always a first among equals.

Rob Cowan



Michel Schwalbé: first among equals



Tony Harrison: producer extraordinaire

TONY HARRISON

Audio producer

Born March 6, 1957

Died September 4, 2012

The respected producer Tony Harrison has died after a battle with cancer. He was married to the painter Karina Paulen and lived with her and their two young boys outside Bergen, Norway. He was 55.

Tony Harrison joined EMI at Abbey Road Studios in 1986 in the historic restoration department. He was soon invited to be an assistant producer for EMI and it was in that capacity that he worked on a number of international recordings, among them the *Gramophone* Award-winning Simon Rattle set of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. He left EMI in 1989 and joined Floating Earth Ltd as senior producer and head of post-production. His special association with Norway began soon afterwards, when he met Leif Ove Andsnes and became his producer for the next 10 years.

In 2008 he collaborated with the Norwegian pianist Sigurd Slåttebrekk on recreating the 1903 acoustic recordings of Grieg playing his own music, which culminated in the CD 'Chasing the Butterfly'. Tony believed passionately that much had been lost in performance styles over the course of the 20th century and much could be learnt by exploring these old recordings. He leaves unfinished a project recreating the performances of Mahler's piano rolls and making orchestral performances based on them.

The violinist Thomas Bowes writes: 'Tony Harrison was an extraordinary producer. His sense of the meaning in music and of the line and timing of events was so unusually acute that he was for the most part over-qualified for the role that most situations demanded. It would be a mistake, though, to say that his demands on artists were in any way rigid or pre-determined; on the contrary, it was his hypersensitivity to the artists' deepest wishes (often not even clear to them) that made things happen.'

NEXT MONTH FEBRUARY 2013



Celebrating Verdi

In the composer's bicentenary year, we speak to Bryn Terfel,

Gianandrea Noseda,

Mark Elder and Renée

Fleming about what made his operas so exceptional

The Grimes to own

In The *Gramophone* Collection, Richard Fairman explores the best recordings of Peter Grimes, Britten's operatic masterpiece

Lost string sounds

Duncan Druce is our 'Specialist's Guide' for exploring recordings of forgotten violin concertos

GRAMOPHONE
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Jonathan Harvey

Composer; born May 3, 1939; died December 4, 2012

Arnold Whittall champions the music of the late visionary electroacoustic pioneer

With its use of then-up-to-date technology, *Mortuos plango, vivos voco* (1980) was something of a signature work for Jonathan Harvey. At the age of 40 he had been invited to work at IRCAM, the research institute recently established in Paris under the directorship of Pierre Boulez, and this nine-minute tape piece using 'computer-manipulated concrete sounds' seemed to delight in the opportunity to turn away from traditional sonorities and 'live' performance contexts. So far, so avant-garde. Yet the 'concrete sounds' did not originate in the recording studio: Harvey's source material was both intensely personal and explicitly local, a combination of the great tenor bell at Winchester Cathedral and the treble voice of his son Dominic, then a chorister at Winchester. What might have been an abstract, abstruse exercise in sound manipulation proved to be the affirmation of a creative identity to which time-honoured spiritual convictions and religious observations were of fundamental importance.

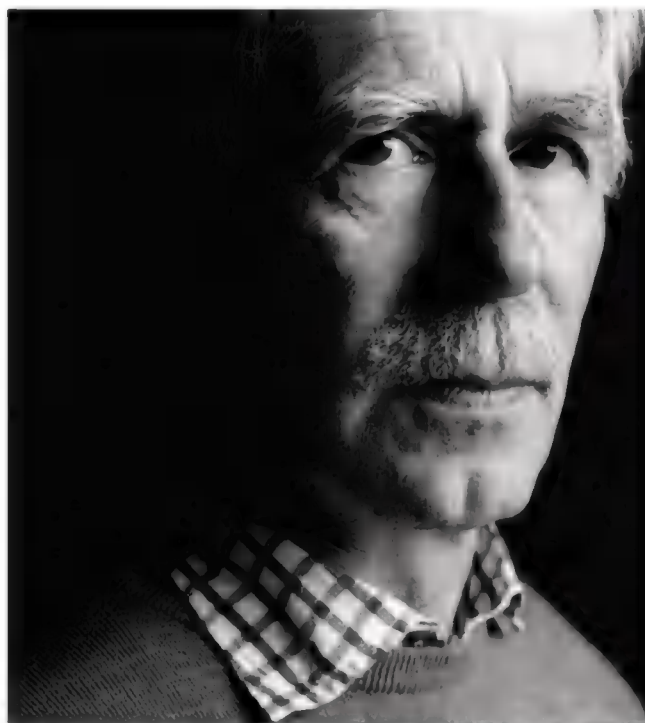
Harvey was always more international than national in outlook, more progressive than conservative in style and technique. But a rootedness in English culture as well as in the fundamentals of musical structures that transform rather than reject tonality gave his work a presence within modernism that was never merely iconoclastic. There were certainly strong contrasts in his early life: a boy chorister at St Michael's College Tenbury, followed by public school and

'Harvey was a powerful advocate of the qualities that bring different philosophies and religions together'

studies at Cambridge University, where the professor of music was the gentle pastoralist composer Patrick Hadley (1899-1973), left him more rebellious than conformist, and as ripe as any child of the 1960s to embrace radicalism. Milton Babbitt and Karlheinz Stockhausen spoke more directly to Harvey than Britten or Tippett, and his early experience as a university teacher at Southampton and Brighton (University of Sussex) strengthened the conviction that it was possible to teach composition and other aspects of music effectively without losing touch with contemporary realities and progressive possibilities.

Harvey wrote one of the first in-depth studies of Stockhausen (1975): but his acute response to the kind of mysticism that could open out into philosophical and theological explorations of spiritual states led to musical manifestations quite different from those of Stockhausen. The *Inner Light* trilogy (1973-77) was Harvey's most ambitious acknowledgement of the impact of Rudolf Steiner, an impact that led to a deep commitment to transcendental meditation and Buddhism.

But he often worked within a Christian context – his first opera, *Passion and Resurrection* (1981) was written for Winchester Cathedral – and he was a powerful advocate of the qualities that bring different philosophies and religions together, as his recent large-scale choral and orchestral composition *Weltethos*



Jonathan Harvey: remained true to the spirit of modernist exploration

(first performed in Berlin in 2011) attests. Harvey's associations with IRCAM, as well as with other specialised studios like that at Stanford University, USA, were notably productive; *Mortuos plango, vivos voco* was followed by a wide range of compositions involving electroacoustics. The 55-minute *Bhakti* (1982) for chamber ensemble and quadraphonic tape provided the NMC record label with its very first CD release (NMC D001) in 1989: since then many other labels have joined NMC in featuring works by Harvey, including such major items as the opera *Wagner Dream* (first performed in 2007) and *Speakings* (2007-8) for large orchestra and electronics.

It is clear that Harvey's mastery of technology yielded particularly rich aesthetic rewards; electroacoustic techniques brought with them a special sensitivity to the 'spectral' nature of sound – the rich collection of overtones that can be explored within and around single pitches. Harvey wrote about how, at its most rewarding, music can enable us to 'see through the delusions of conventional reality and experience liberation', and his music remained true to the spirit of modernist exploration by means of which such ideals have the best chance of being realised. The single CD that shows this most strikingly might well be that containing four choral compositions (Hyperion CDA67835, 7/11). These range from the relatively simple anthem *The Angels* (1999) and the more elaborate unaccompanied choral work *Marabi* (1999) to pieces combining choral sound with electronics (*Ashes Dance Back*, 1997) and choral sound with flute and cello as well as electronics (*The Summer Cloud's Awakening*, 2001) – music, both earthy and other-worldly, of mesmerising intensity yet immediate appeal. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Choral Works – The Angels. Ashes Dance Back. Marabi. The Summer Cloud's Awakening
Latvian Radio Choir / James Wood; Kaspars Putniņš
Hyperion © CDA67835

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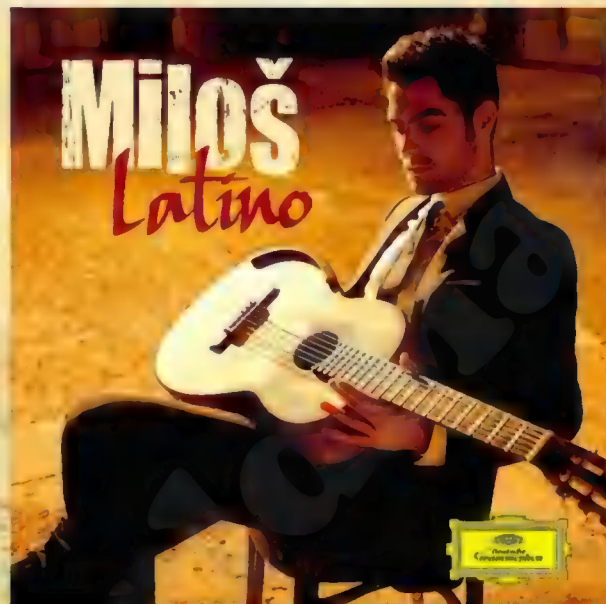
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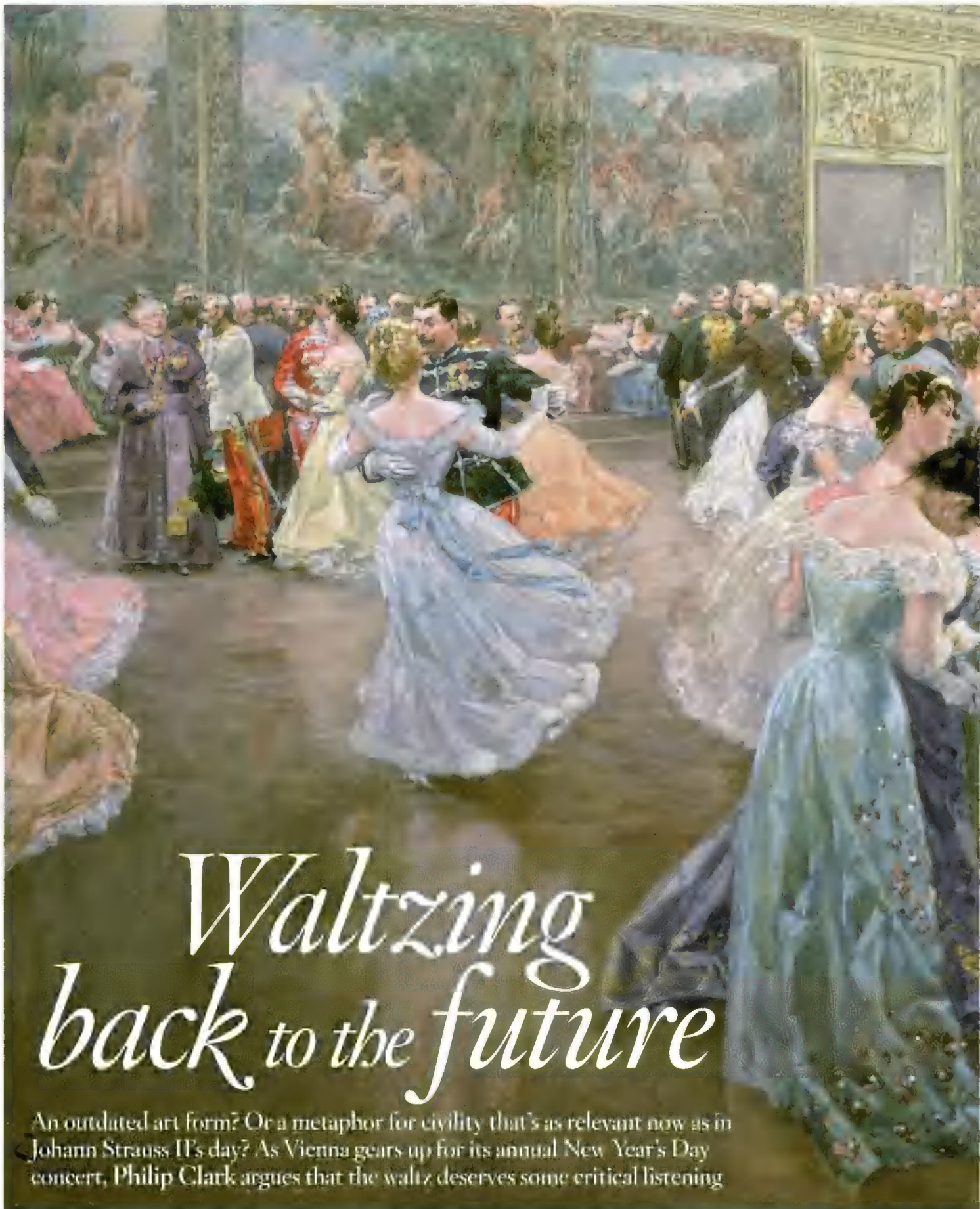
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PHOTOGRAPHY: THE ART GALLERY COLLECTION/ALAMY

Waltzing back to the future

An outdated art form? Or a metaphor for civility that's as relevant now as in Johann Strauss II's day? As Vienna gears up for its annual New Year's Day concert, Philip Clark argues that the waltz deserves some critical listening



When Stanley Kubrick was asked how the heck his imagination arrived at the idea of spacecraft waltzing in time to Johann Strauss II's *Blue Danube*, he explained that the intricate inner choreographic twist of Strauss's composition was a flawless match for the 'beautiful, graceful motion of the space station. It just seemed like a perfect representation of what was going on.' And so spaceships waltzed like it was 1867.

But in 1968, the year Kubrick released *2001: A Space Odyssey* to an amazed and somewhat baffled cinema audience, a movie director with a very different artistic purview was also underscoring a key sequence from his forthcoming film with a Strauss waltz. The climactic scene of *Carry On up the Khyber*, directed by Gerald Thomas, finds the British Raj in crisis. The Governor of Khalabar, Sir Sidney Ruff-Diamond (Sid James), is having dinner with his cronies as their mansion comes under sustained fire from local Burpa warlords. But with masonry crashing on to their plates, and slabs of ceiling splashing into the soup, they resolve that nothing must disrupt dinner. Englishmen abroad *must* keep up appearances! Especially when under the cosh of Johnny Foreigner. And as the very foundations crumble, a palm court trio play on – the soothing oom-cha-cha of Strauss waltzes counterpointed against the chaos, destruction and dirty-chuckle innuendo.

Whether Kubrick had even heard of Thomas is anyone's guess, but it does say something significant about the waltz that these two directors – Kubrick crafting the most aesthetically abstract and technically sophisticated movie of its time, and Thomas reheating an already overcooked *carte du jour* of camp, insipid lard – shared strikingly similar reasons for evoking old-time Vienna.

A film that otherwise used Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and Ligeti's Requiem to unify extraordinary images with sounds at once primordial and space age, *2001* was, through its use of the *Blue Danube*, earthed in the every day. Kubrick's space station revolves around its own axis, giving out noticeably flirtatious signals as a spacecraft hovers into view. It is about to dock. An intimate union is sought. Boy is about to meet girl. During the film's opening scene, we've witnessed an ape throw a gnawed-at leg bone into the air, which

'It's a dance form which frankly acknowledges that members of the opposite sex find each other attractive'

through typical Kubrick magic travels higher than the curvature of the Earth and morphs into a spaceship. And this masterly visual sleight of hand is later partly explained by the *Blue Danube*. Our need to explore and communicate is rooted in primeval instinct, Kubrick reminds us. The Viennese waltz, too, no matter how refined and loaded with social etiquette and protocol it has become, spins from that same core of desire. It has retained an emotional hold over us because it's a dance form which frankly acknowledges that members of the opposite sex find each other attractive. Although rooted in the barely discernible mists of time, it's about human interaction; about the furtherance of the human race. In *2001* and *Carry On up the Khyber* the waltz is a sonic metaphor for civility, progress and a timeless sense of order.

A LIFE OF ITS OWN

As a recurring trope in the development of 19th- and 20th-century music, the waltz makes relentless progress. Almost as soon as travelling musicians brought its early forms, such as the Ländler, down the Danube to Vienna during the 17th century, the waltz took on a life and identity of its own. Mozart incorporated three of them into his 1787 opera *Don Giovanni* and was duly taken to task for an act of gross musical vulgarity. Not that anyone cared. Dance halls opened all over Vienna, and dance halls need dance orchestras – a vacuum soon enough filled by Johann Strauss senior. Boundaries between 'high' art and the folk vernacular crumbled. In 1819, Weber wrote the first 'hit' concert waltz, *Invitation to the Dance*. Meanwhile, Brahms autographed Johann Strauss's stepdaughter's score of the *Blue Danube* with the inscription 'Alas, not by Brahms!'.

And you can be sure that an art form has etched itself into permanence when it starts to ruminate on its own existence. The subliminally unsettling waltz limp of the second movement of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony – written in 1893, and in 5/4 time – is indicative of a man who felt out of step with society's gender norms. But this rhythmic cipher would have meant little unless Tchaikovsky felt certain that his listeners knew how a 'hetero' waltz sounded. There's an undeniable warming irony about Schoenberg choosing to stir up memories of the waltz just as his music was on the turn, moving away from the free atonality of *Pierrot*

lunaire and *Erwartung* towards formalised 12-note music; the Second Viennese School's guru was drawing on First Viennese School pop music. The 'Waltz' movement of his *Five Pieces for Piano*, Op 23 (1923) unlocked the inner secrets of serial methodology; his first consciously serial pieces, the Piano Suite, Op 25, and Wind Quintet, Op 26, followed. If the Viennese waltz's relationship with the modern world is often thought to have reached its apogee in Ravel's 1920 ballet score *La valse*, no one seems sure exactly why. From the composer of *Mother Goose* and *Daphnis et Chloé*, *La valse* is pure ballet-noir. Culminating with Ravel brutally felling the rhythmic inner-motor characteristic of a classic waltz, the whole tradition is depicted as imploding. Was this Ravel's barbed critique of decadent, post-First World War Vienna? That is the assumption, although he denied it implicitly.

I myself became interested in waltz culture a few years ago, when I was hunting down antecedents for that very particular brand of dance-band music that existed in the United States during the mid-1920s and early 1930s. Bands such as those led by Will Marion Cooke and Paul Whiteman toured the country in an endless parade of for-one-night-only gigs playing an assortment of lollipop classics, waltzes, ragtime and sanitised jazz for a mass audience. Almost a century earlier, Johann Strauss senior had fulfilled a comparable role in central Europe, plundering Weber's opera *Oberon* for his composition *Wiener Carneval* and endearing himself to the French by incorporating *La Marseillaise* into his *Paris Waltzer*. Producing a touring show guaranteed to please, he was the X factor incarnate.

LET'S GET CRITICAL

Certainly any article that manages, without too much contrivance, to suck into its frame of reference Kubrick, Tchaikovsky, Sid James and Schoenberg is likely to be concerned with subject matter that has a well-heeled secret history. A problem of perception exists. We have listened so hard to the *Blue Danube*, *Tales from the Vienna Woods* and *Vienna Blood* over so many decades that we've stopped hearing them critically. And one thing's for sure – the presence of today's self-appointed 'King of the Waltz', André Rieu, a man not unnecessarily burdened by questions of authenticity, only queers the pitch further.



Johann Strauss II and his orchestra – coloured lithograph, c1900



Waltzes featured in the repertoire of Paul Whiteman and his band in 1920s USA



Ravel's La valse inspired Frederick Ashton to choreograph it for the Royal Ballet

No, any state-of-the-art thoughts about the waltz clearly lie elsewhere, and the pity about the Rieu phenomenon – let's acknowledge that he's a commercial phenomenon before moving swiftly on – is that the serious-minded research of others into waltz history and performance practice has been overshadowed by all the gloss. Jos van Immerseel's 2005 album of Strauss waltzes (with polkas and overtures) used period instruments and a fresh-off-the-press new Bärenreiter edition. Nikolaus Harnoncourt's album 'Walzer Revolution', released in 2012, then raised the authenticity stakes even higher. Using a theatre-orchestra-sized version of Concentus Musicus Wien, Harnoncourt traced the waltz through Mozart's German dances to Joseph Lanner and Johann Strauss senior. Many sources claim Lanner as the first musician to take the initiative and transcribe the 'peasant' waltz for 'serious' musicians. In 1818 he formed a trio to play waltzes; when his friend Johann Strauss joined on the viola, the ensemble migrated into a quartet. But listening to Harnoncourt's record it becomes clear why Lanner fell off the popular radar: compared with those of Strauss, his melodic strains are stubbornly unmemorable. Strauss was the anointed one.

With Harnoncourt's period-appropriate trumpets and obsessive attention to finding the right percussion and woodwind instruments (digging those feral flutes and clarinets, Nikolaus!), the sound world he conjures up is indeed a whole sound world away from the Vienna Philharmonic's plush and sonically homogenised tone. The VPO's New Year's Day concert has been performed every year since 1939 and is to Vienna what the Last Night of the Proms is to London: a party atmosphere prevails, and certain programming conventions must be observed. As in 2011, this year's concert – which will be available on CD, DVD, Blu-ray, vinyl and digital download soon after the event – will be conducted by Franz Welser-Möst, and the significance of this music to a Linz-born Austrian becomes obvious as we talk about the New Year's Day ritual. 'Having tried to teach waltzes to other orchestras such as the London Philharmonic and the New York Philharmonic, and realising how difficult it is for them to get even close to an authentic rhythmic feel, standing in front of the Vienna Philharmonic

No one is arguing that Strauss waltzes can encompass the emotional hinterland of a Mahler symphony'

for the first time on New Year's Day 2011 was very special. It's their language; magically, the grammar of the music is right,' he says.

Welser-Möst explains how waltz-thinking has implanted into Austrian music gestures and rhythms various inflections that music notation can't quite capture: it's in their Vienna blood. Looking for a cultural equivalent elsewhere, I ask if the waltz grounds Austrian music in the same way that the blues lends jazz its emotional sting. 'I think that's right,' he responds. 'The Austrian waltz is more than just a happy dance. There's depth and melancholy, and one needs to feel that. You see, we are so close to Bohemia, and Bohemian folk music is full of longing and homesickness.' And which waltzes are particularly melancholic? 'In general the waltzes by Josef Strauss, Johann II's brother, are more melancholic. Josef was more introverted than Johann, who was a womaniser, and loved living the life.'

THAT SECOND-BEAT PHENOMENON

A successful waltz performance, Welser-Möst declares, sinks or swims by how faithfully its conductor deals with the music's most idiosyncratic tradition: that early, anticipated second beat. And it does all come down to boy meets girl. 'Anyone who has danced the Viennese waltz knows that the second beat simply must be played early,' he says. 'The second step will always come a little early; that is how people's bodies work. But the question is, how early? That depends on the character of the melody. If the melody is, let's say, racy, then the second beat comes very early; if the melody is melancholic, it comes just a little early.'

What about the waltz's uncertain status, though? Even the preface to the published score of the *Blue Danube* poses a blunt, niggling question – is this 'utility' music or 'art' music? Certainly no one is arguing that Strauss waltzes can encompass the emotional hinterland of a Mahler, Schubert or Bruckner symphony. The form could never allow for that ambiguity or complexity of scale. But waltzes do have a world-from-their-window wisdom that elevates them far beyond the utilitarian. It is a rare waltz indeed that fails to conform to the basic blueprint set out in the *Blue Danube*: introduction, five unfolding sections in closely interrelated keys, and coda. Rather like operating within the structural

constraints of ragtime, the best composers paradoxically find limitless freedoms within the formula of strict 32-bar phrases and an unspoken requirement not to upset the structural apple cart. The basic recipe allowed waltzes to be composed quickly, and to order. Johann II's *Town Hall Ball Waltz*, Op 438 (!), recycles material from the *Blue Danube*. The Strausses were a one-family waltz factory.

'Within the *Blue Danube* or *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, the moods and characters of the melodies change constantly,' Welser-Möst continues. 'In a waltz you normally have 10 different melodies, and that means (at least) 10 different ways of how early to play the second beat. But it's not only how early you play the second beat, but also how long you play the second and third beats. Anything that's as difficult as that is surely high art! And Strauss knew this: he said that when people dance to waltzes, musicians must play them steadily, but in concerts there should be lots of tiny *rubatos*. Viennese people tell me that the Philharmonic could play this music by themselves. While this is true in theory, the tiny little things that make waltzes so much more charming and interesting are very tough without a conductor.'

For many, the golden era of New Year's Day performances was 1955-79, when the concerts were led by violinist and conductor Willi Boskovsky. But Welser-Möst takes a particular view on Boskovsky's reign: 'His concerts were great, no question, but most people agree that the first concert Carlos Kleiber did, in 1989, took it to another level. After Boskovsky, Karajan, Claudio Abbado and Georges Prêtre all proved what world-class conductors can do with this music. Boskovsky did not have that same quality of mind.'

And so waltzes deserve great conductors; more to the point, without careful shaping and finessing a waltz is barely a waltz at all. Vienna is an architecturally ornate and proud city; its indigenous music follows suit. Is it just me, or did the magic noticeably evaporate later in the 19th century when Oscar Straus and Franz Lehár started including waltzes in their operettas? Did the rhythms become flatfooted, the melodies like schmaltzy parodies? If so, no matter. The actual tradition of the Viennese waltz, as heard every January 1, has sustained itself without missing a beat. Waltzes continue to float through space and time – carrying on regardless. **G**





Debutantes bow to one another on the dance floor for their first waltz at the 50th Vienna Opera Ball, February 23, 2006




Franz Welser-Möst conducting the New Year's Day concert in Vienna, 2011

SIX WALTZ RECORDINGS TO EXPLORE

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 **New Year's Concert in Vienna, 2011**
VPO / Franz Welser-Möst
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Welser-Möst's 2011 homecoming concert - how will it compare to 2013?

 **New Year's Concert in Vienna, 2012**
VPO / Mariss Jansons
Sony Classical © 2
88691 91377-2
Last year's concert - comprising the usual fare, plus Tchaikovsky.



A composer's best friend

From Parry and Holst to Elgar and Vaughan Williams, conductor Sir Adrian Boult's championing of modern British composers ensured their music's survival to this day, writes Geraint Lewis

In October 1895 we made the great experiment of taking him to a Richter concert. He enjoyed every moment with scarlet cheeks and sparkling eyes. Tchaikovsky's Sixth was in the programme and he got a little *intrigué* at the five-time movement, but soon got it clear and (quite unobtrusively) beat the whole thing quite correctly.'

Katherine Boult was not writing boastfully for posterity, but if ever a child was born to be a conductor it was her six-year-old son Adrian Cedric. On his arrival at Christ Church, Oxford, 13 years later in 1908 he was asked what career he intended to make for himself. The clear-cut response, 'I am going to be a conductor', nearly knocked the Dean off his chair. His mother's journal already attests to a remarkably accurate ear, aptitude at the piano, inquisitive 'baby' composition and an insatiable appetite for music itself. After the opening item at that Liverpool concert in October 1895, 'he turned round to me and said, "Oh I do like it, Mummie"'. This was Siegfried's Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung*, conducted by Hans Richter (who had given its premiere) in memory of his colleague Charles Hallé, who had died the previous day. That 'hand of history' on his shoulder followed Boult throughout his life, and even if destiny had dealt him an extraordinarily lucky hand, it was through determination, courage and mental grit that he became one of the 20th century's greatest conductors.

The programme he chose for his first public concert on February 27, 1914, at home in West Kirby on the Wirral foreshadowed things to come: Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* No 2 rubs shoulders with Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, some of Schumann's Piano Concerto and the first performance of George Butterworth's evergreen orchestral idyll *The Banks of Green Willow*. The players were drawn from the Liverpool Phil and Hallé orchestras. Boult modestly noted: 'I tried my hand for the first time with a professional orchestra,' and a critic observed that 'his manner is devoid of all ostentation'.

The outbreak of the Great War five months later was to direct the young conductor's path in unpredictable ways, but then there was no predictable career path for a young conductor in England. Dan Godfrey, Henry Wood and Thomas Beecham were rare examples of the indigenous species struggling in a jungle dominated by exotic foreigners. Boult's advantage was that he came, socially and intellectually, from the English top-drawer. During his formative years at Westminster School (1901-08) he had lived and dreamt in the Queen's Hall and at Covent Garden and came to know the greatest performers in the fullest range of music then available. His diaries give a bird's-eye view of concert life in Edwardian London; he comes to

Adrian Boult, 11, at the
here in July 1935,
was renowned for his
frank and full control of the
orchestra and a typically
use of the baton

razor-sharp judgements of amazing maturity, and his social encounters are of dazzling relevance. Young Boult's heroes were German: he compares the virtues of Richter, Steinbach, Weingartner, Nikisch (his idol) and Richard Strauss, and is thrilled when visiting European orchestras open his ears to superior sounds and standards.

After finishing at Oxford in 1912, there was no alternative in his mind to studying at the Leipzig Conservatory and, having lunched with Nikisch at the Savoy as early as 1909, his path was clear. Had the war (and a bout of ill-health) not intervened, Boult might have remained in Germany at a provincial opera-house, climbing the well-worn ladder to become a Karl Böhm or Furtwängler. (He must have been gratified when in 1934 Alban Berg wrote to him, having just heard on radio the British concert premiere of *Wozzeck* – 'What emerged here under your sovereign direction was a performance as if from the regular repertoire of the greatest stage'.) But in England in 1913 Boult had to find that ladder for himself, and by the end of the war he was already a significant figure in the lives of the greatest English composers of the time.

Top of the tree was Hubert Parry. Some might find odd today Boult's admission that he had 'been brought up to think of English music as rather small beer', yet as he sang in a concert of Parry's music at Oxford, he found himself rubbing his eyes in wonder, 'for I could hardly believe that it really was great music'. His first conducting task, oddly, was to control an off-stage chorus in the 1909 Greek play *The Frogs*, for which Parry provided the music: 'I shall never forget Parry's happy smile when I got my frogs to sing well ahead of the accompaniment they could dimly hear'. It was Boult's earliest experience of satisfying a composer!

At his first Liverpool Philharmonic Society concert in January 1916 he conducted Parry's *Symphonic Variations* (1897) and gave it again with the LSO at Queen's Hall on March 4, 1918, with Parry present to advise. A fortnight earlier, Boult had revived *A London Symphony* by Ralph Vaughan Williams – 'May I say how much I admired your conducting – it is real conducting – you get just what you want & know what you want & your players trust you because they know it also...' Parry too congratulated him 'on the good hold you have on the performers'.

This historic series of early spring concerts in 1918 gave Boult the chance to repeat the Vaughan Williams symphony immediately, and in so doing allowed the composer to start revising the score, with the conductor there to encourage and advise. Elgar, too, enjoyed Boult's conducting of *In the South*, popping into the rehearsal and writing admiringly in the conductor's score. Younger composers featuring in those early concerts included Holst, Bax, Harty, Ireland and Butterworth, Boult's old Oxford friend, who was killed on the Somme in August 1916. The crowning triumph of this *annus mirabilis*, however, was the premiere at Queen's Hall on September 29 of a striking orchestral suite – 'This score is the property of Adrian Boult who first caused *The Planets* to shine in public and so earned the gratitude of Gustav Holst,' inscribed the composer on Boult's well-worn score.

In many ways, 1918 provided a blueprint for Boult's future development, and by 1920 he was contracted to HMV. His first disc was of Butterworth's rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* – a work that had premiered at Leeds in 1913 under Nikisch, with Boult sitting at Butterworth's side. A little later, Arthur Bliss was rather too present for the recording of *Rout*, to which he added a premature cry of 'By Jove, you fellows, that was grand!'

Boult went on to develop close friendships with most of these varied composers. But Parry's death before the 1918 Armistice cast a shadow over English musical life and his music suffered an immediate and seemingly permanent eclipse. It is poignant now to read Boult writing prophetically in 1973 that 'I can't help feeling that there will some day be a revival of Parry's music...there is such great power and strength there'. His pioneering 1971 Lyrita disc of Parry was capped in 1979 by

'Without the passionate understanding of Boult in the studio, these scores would have lost their only link to Elgar himself'



Boult with Michael Tippett, and Ralph and Ursula Vaughan Williams in February 1958



With Sir Edward Elgar on the podium at Abbey Road Studios in the early 1930s

his last recording of all, Parry's Fifth Symphony. He wrote in the summer of 1980, 'I'm so pleased my swansong...has been dubbed best seller by the *Sunday Times* or some other paper – Parry as a best seller!!'

For Elgar in 1920, Boult brought the Second Symphony (poorly received in 1911) in from the cold and prompted the composer to write, 'I feel that my reputation in the future is safe in your hands. It was a wonderful series of sounds. Bless you!' Lady Elgar's death a month later effectively silenced Elgar and so Boult's role was to keep performances going in the face of dwindling public interest. Although Boult had met Elgar for the first time as a privileged Westminster schoolboy in 1904,

the early acclaimed triumphs – *Enigma* (1899) and *Gerontius* (1900) – left Boult feeling quite cool, as if no English work could stand alongside his foreign heroes. He was then present at the premieres of the First Symphony


under Richter (1908) and Violin Concerto played by Kreisler (1911) and so witnessed at first hand the high watermark of the so-called pre-war English Musical Renaissance.

His great posthumous favour to Elgar was to make the first complete recordings of *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom* and *The Music Makers* for EMI in the late '60s and early '70s, when these noble works were dismissed outside the Three Choirs Festivals. Without Boult's passionate understanding in the studio, these scores would have lost their only living link to Elgar himself, and their concert-hall rehabilitation under Sir Mark Elder proves how right Boult was to champion them. Boult's



friendship with Vaughan Williams was very different. He had met him in his first year at Oxford during a private piano run-through of the Cambridge *Wasps* music – ‘...I sang far better than Vaughan Williams played.’ From the same social and educational background (unlike Elgar’s), they were on an equal footing, with Vaughan Williams often deferring to Boult’s interpretative authority. When Boult opened a newly published score of *Job* he found, unexpectedly, that it was dedicated to him. The culmination of their partnership was the first recording of the complete symphonies in 1952 – a task finished on the morning of Vaughan Williams’s death, August 26, 1958, when Boult and the LPO were ready to put down the Ninth in Walthamstow Town Hall. Boult had been Vaughan Williams’s Richter, and his support continued through the years to come when – as with Parry and Elgar – the composer’s reputation foundered. Most striking here was the glowing interpretation captured by EMI in 1972 of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, whose theatrical flop in 1951 had hurt Vaughan Williams deeply. It has taken 60 years to bring it back to the stage, but, thanks to Boult, its musical glories were never in question.

Boult never had such close friendships with the younger group of British composers. Walton and Britten could conduct for themselves, and the relationship with Michael Tippett was that of pupil and teacher. Boult had allowed the would-be composer into his rostrum at weekly orchestra sessions but possibly didn’t realise that this led to the players referring to him as ‘Boult’s darling’. Tippett wrote to his mentor on Boult’s 85th birthday in 1974, ‘You won’t remember (tho I do, as yesterday) my standing beside you at the rostrum at the RCM...But what I learnt, as a composer, through those four years of Fridays at yr side is nobody’s business. A belated thank you – & for much beyond’.

Boult never recorded any Tippett, but for both Lyrita and EMI between 1964 and 1977 he performed comprehensive rehabilitations for arguably lesser figures such as Ireland, Moeran, Bax, Butterworth, Coates, Finzi, Howells and Bliss – a remarkable living legacy to stand beside his treasury of Parry, Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams. Even though Boult hankered in old age to be back with Wagner in the opera house, the British composers of his time had every cause to thank Fate for making Sir Adrian Boult their best possible musical friend. 

FOUR RECORDINGS TO EXPLORE



Parry
Symphony No 5, etc
LPO / Boult
EMI (M) 565107-2

Boult returns to champion the music of his youth in this heroic last recording of 1979.



Holst
The Planets, etc
LPO / Boult
Heritage (M) HTGCD233

A new reissue of a 1953 *The Planets* that some have claimed to be the most vivid of Boult’s five post-war versions.



Elgar
The Dream of Gerontius,
The Apostles, etc
LPO and Chorus; New
Philharmonia Orchestra / Boult
EMI (S) (C) 367931-2

Boult’s authoritative accounts of Elgar’s four Birmingham Festival scores. A remarkable bargain.



Vaughan Williams
Symphonies Nos 1-9
Decca (S) (C) 473 241-2DC5

Begun in 1952 to mark Vaughan Williams’s 80th birthday, this is still the best complete cycle on disc, capturing performances of searing urgency and rare spiritual power.



MUSICAL MAGICIAN

In the centenary year of Lutosławski's birth, Michael McManus pays tribute to the Polish composer who, in conducting his own work, created a perfect alchemy in the concert hall

A century after his birth and almost 19 years since his death, Witold Lutosławski remains a much-admired enigma. His musical language was entirely his own, its roots complex and, in part, simply unknowable. It is wonderful that so many fine conductors of the current generation – including Sir Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Edward Gardner – are keeping the flame alive, and, in this centenary year, Rattle and Salonen will lead major retrospectives, in Berlin and London respectively. Lutosławski's own advocacy of his works for orchestra was so compelling that, somehow, the man and the music were one: quirky, technically brilliant and always evocative, with a piquant tinge of regret and sadness.

Lutosławski's life had been marked by tragedy and loss. His father and uncle were murdered by the Bolsheviks, his family saw its fortunes destroyed, and both his brother and his cousin died in the Second World War. But if he carried scars, they were manifested in his music and certainly not in his charming manner. As Salonen puts it, 'The epilogues of really important pieces evoke an image of somebody walking past smoking ruins in a very quiet and desolate landscape.'

I first encountered Witold Lutosławski at the 1988 Warsaw Autumn Festival, when he ended a seven-year period of self-imposed 'internal emigration' by conducting the Polish premiere of his new piano concerto, having refused to conduct in his homeland since the declaration of martial law in December 1981. At the final rehearsal, he received a hero's welcome and I witnessed the meticulous style and assured conducting technique of this self-effacing and fastidious man. The musicians loved playing for him, and with him. Though the evening performance was more than sold out, an empty box at the end of the balcony remained. This was the preserve of Communist Party apparatchiks, I was told, and the concert wouldn't start until they arrived; but Lutosławski swept onto the podium and began to conduct, proud and defiant. What a contrast with the musicians of central and eastern Europe who would genuflect before discredited regimes.

Lutosławski's musical progress falls broadly into four phases. Before the Second World War he was highly influenced by Debussy and Bartók: 'I am a composer of harmonies,' he said in 1989, 'and I think the most important discoveries in this domain were made by Debussy, in comparison with the tonal system, which was in a state of being dismantled'. From 1948 to 1956, however, under the Stalinist regime in Poland, he found himself writing film music. He told Rattle: 'All of us wrote the music we had to write, but we also wrote the music which was

'If Lutosławski carried scars, they were manifested in his music and certainly not in his charming manner'

only for the drawers in our desk...you would have to wait until the world changed.' His Symphony No 1 had the honour of being the first piece to be denounced by the Stalinists as 'formalist', but he won acceptance with his folk-influenced (if decidedly chromatic) Concerto for Orchestra, still perhaps his most popular piece. His friend Stanisław Skrowaczewski has conducted it all over the world and believes Lutosławski achieved the near-impossible, composing a piece of real merit without attracting the attention of the political *nomenklatura*.

After 1956 brought a political thaw, Lutosławski began to compose cabaret songs under the pseudonym Derwid and to experiment with tone rows and 'limited aleatorism', bringing an element of chance into carefully delineated passages in his orchestral scores, specifying pitch but leaving duration to individual players, creating a shimmering, cascading quality. These scores set formidable challenges for conductors and Lutosławski took to the podium himself from 1963. He never abandoned the aleatoric technique entirely, but came to recognise that it could sap his pieces of momentum: 'The group *ad libitum* technique has greatly enriched the rhythm, expression and texture of my compositions, to an extent which otherwise would be impossible,' he told one interviewer, 'but the music which results is static to quite a considerable degree.' Insofar as tone rows were concerned, Lutosławski declared simply: 'I have nothing to do with the dodecaphonic school.'

This was not music without a soul, as Rattle has observed: 'Though he is often using very experimental techniques, his music has a very direct emotional impact and an enormous, optimistic energy and refinement.' Salonen characterises this as a musical 'third way': 'He was not part of the European modernist movement...the rather militant Darmstadt type of serialist movement after the war...nor was he in the opposition, the way the minimalists were...He had chosen a different path.'

In 1970, Lutosławski adumbrated a new and more accessible style in his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, which sounds like an angry 20-minute argument between soloist and orchestra, leavened by (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts at reconciliation. His final, more melodic creative phase came into its own, however, with his Symphony No 3 of 1983, which emerged over the course of a decade and saw the

light of day during the period of martial law. Yet this piece evinces no trace of what a *Gramophone* reviewer described in 1979 as Lutosławski's 'moments of piano bashing'. The composer was deeply uneasy with the notion that artists might be affected in their work by external events. It opens and ends with an overt reference to Beethoven's Fifth, and both Rattle and Gardner regard the symphony as a masterpiece, Gardner finding in it 'something very visceral – when resolution does come, it is so full of soul'. In Lutosławski's Symphony No 4 (1992), surely another masterpiece, it is impossible not to hear valedictory echoes of Debussy.

Gardner is establishing himself as the leading Lutosławski advocate through his superb recordings of the canon with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which the composer himself often conducted. The bold decision by Chandos to record in surround-sound is vividly vindicated: Lutosławski's musical poetry deserves to envelop the listener and, in this series, it truly does. Gardner's commitment is long term: 'I will do it for the rest of my career...he is a magician...the way these free parts sit together...a law of amazing, Einstein-level probability...individual players playing with such character and body, and soloistically.'

Lutosławski in the concert hall eschewed the wild exhilaration that Leonard Bernstein or Klaus Tennstedt could inspire; nor did he generate the pious reverence associated with Günter Wand or Sergiu Celibidache. Especially in the case of the pieces with aleatoric sections, however, it was the freshness that inspired. There was also the special energy generated by a composer relinquishing, for a time at least, creative control to his colleagues in the orchestra. The musicians relished the freedom he gave them; and at all his performances, listeners felt themselves to be present at a unique event – the element of chance combined with Lutosławski's authority in a perfect alchemy.

Between the Polish premiere of his Piano Concerto and the UK premiere of his Symphony No 4 five years later, I attended Lutosławski's concerts and rehearsals whenever I could. With infinite courtesy, he would discuss his compositions and current events with verve and insight. He became a mentor of sorts, as much through how he conducted himself as how he conducted his music. His biographer Charles Bodman Rae pays the perfect tribute: 'Those who prefer their contemporary orchestral music to be more confrontational, more raw, may find Lutosławski's music too refined and polished for their tastes. But for those of us who appreciate the sensitivity of his ear for the subtle sonorities of the orchestra, and who find the dramatic unfolding of his musical ideas compelling, the 2013 centenary will be a wonderful opportunity to reacquire ourselves with works that are like old friends.' Rattle goes further: 'It is time to welcome him back into the pantheon of our greatest composers.' Either way, it is a pleasure and privilege to commemorate this gentle musical aristocrat – in the very best sense of that word – on his centenary. ⑥

FOUR RECORDINGS TO EXPLORE



Symphonies, Concerto for Orchestra, etc
Polish Radio National SO / Lutosławski

EMI ⑤ 215318-2

Originally a set of LPs issued in the mid-1970s, this is a peerless survey of orchestral compositions up to then.



Cello Concerto
Rostropovich vc Paris Orchestra / Lutosławski

EMI ⑤ 567867-2 (11/02)

There is always something special about Slava. We might hear a recording of the 1970 world premiere on disc one day. One for ICA Classics?



Symphonies Nos 3 and 4. Les espaces du sommeil
Shirley-Quirk bar Los Angeles PO / Salonen

Sony ⑤ SBK90480 (11/94*)

This world-premiere recording is a worthy substitute for Lutosławski's own of Symphony No 3.



Orchestral Works, Vol 2
Lortie pf BBC SO / Gardner

Chandos ⑤ CHSA5098 (4/12)

Enticing masterpieces from both ends of the composer's career – including the *Symphonic Variations* and Symphony No 4.

An Olympian year for classical music

The past 12 months have offered a plethora of exceptional recordings and live performances. In true Gramophone tradition, the editorial team pick their favourite musical moments of 2012



Russian pianist Alexander Melnikov: contributed to a magical moment for the editor

Martin Cullingford

Editor

The role of *Gramophone* editor, which I've now been honoured to hold for a year, sees vast numbers of recordings pass across my desk. The year's richness has already been reflected across 12 months of reviews pages, and celebrated in the Awards and in last month's Critics' Choice selections. But, given the sheer breadth and depth of era and genre I've enjoyed exploring, perhaps I should defer to longevity of listening as a yardstick of excellence. The vivid playing of violinist Isabelle Faust in some of the great Bs – Bach, Beethoven and Berg – features highly. But it's another Harmonia Mundi disc to which she contributed that I'd like to highlight here: Alexander Melnikov's

masterful recording of Shostakovich's Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 2, which also includes the Violin Sonata. The whole disc is superb, but listening to the sublime slow movement of the Second Concerto happened to coincide with descending into Stockholm airport during late winter, the frozen fields beneath just beginning to emerge early from their hard covering. Our reviewer David Fanning wrote: 'Starting at a whisper, Melnikov fines his sound down to the threshold of audibility and extends phrase-endings until the world seems to stand still' – a description I can't better. I'm not sure why the fusion of music and moment should have felt quite so powerful, but it did, and I'm grateful for it.

James Jolly

Editor-in-chief

Thinking back 12 months for the most memorable concert, it's all too easy to alight on a Big Musical Event – such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt's revelatory *Missa solennis* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra at the Barbican, or Riccardo Chailly's shattering Mahler Sixth with the Gewandhaus Orchestra at the Proms. But one concert stands out for its very opposite qualities. It's a harp recital given by Xavier de Maistre as part of the Engadin Festival in one of the loveliest regions of Switzerland. The magic started long before the concert, as the only way to reach the tiny church halfway up a mountain was by horse-drawn carriage. The church in Fex-Crasta – which seats no more than 50 people – has murals that date back to the 16th century and is in a spot where utter silence reigns. So when de Maistre took us through a programme of Handel, Tárrega, Granados, Caplet, Parish Alvars and Godefröid, there was nothing to disturb the delicacy of the music except the occasional Mahlerian bell-sound as a horse moved outside in the darkness. And as an encore, de Maistre gave us his own transcription of Smetana's *Vltava* – as enchanting as it was virtuoso!



De Maistre tunes up in front of a 16th-century mural

Sarah Kirkup

Deputy editor

As a self-confessed ballet nut, I've always enjoyed attending concerts of music from ballets I love. I visualise the dancing as the music is playing: it's the next best thing to seeing the ballet itself – or so I thought.

Cinderella is not a ballet I'm particularly familiar with, and so Prokofiev's music hasn't embedded itself into my psyche. But Valery Gergiev's belief in the music led him to perform the complete score with the LSO at this year's Proms. Respecting his ambition to raise the public's perception of ballet music, I went along for the ride.

It was the first time I'd heard ballet music as music for its own sake, and it was remarkably liberating. The music was by turns rhythmically exciting, melodically memorable and romantically charming. And the LSO fully embraced it – performing it with as much commitment and enthusiasm as they would a Mahler symphony. When the clock chimed midnight, percussion and string sections playing frantically, there was a buzz of excitement – not least from the two children sitting next me, who were mesmerised from start to finish. Next time I need a quick ballet fix, maybe I'll reach for a CD instead of a DVD...



The clock chimes midnight: Elisha Willis as Cinderella for Birmingham Royal Ballet



Nicholas Collon conducts the Aurora Orchestra

Andrew Mellor

Reviews editor

We can talk for hours about the restrictions and curiosities of the 'inherited' concert format – a few pieces of acoustic music played from 7.30pm in a quiet room. But as frustrating as that format can be, viable alternatives are elusive. Aurora Orchestra scheduled a concert in March that looked as though it indulged every cliché in the 'new concert format' book: a tenuous theme (travel), a desperation to cross genres (playing with a cult country band) and a patronising insistence on 'explaining' the music verbally.

But the theme wasn't tenuous, the band collaboration was a masterstroke and the introductory interviews and verse readings gave us context, not direction. Whoever decided to programme Aaron Copland, Julian Anderson, Hannah Dilkes, George Rimmer, Jack Sheen, Richard Wagner, Paul Simon and Harry Oakwood Millionaire (the band) in one concert has an ear for musical connection and narrative atmosphere that I would kill for. Did it 'take risks'? No, because everyone knew what they were doing and worked very hard at it – playing beautifully enough to make you weep. I saw the future at LSO St Luke's.

James McCarthy

Features editor

I used to live in the Scottish Highlands, close to the Moray Firth and the broken castle in the middle of the water at Lochindorb, with the Cairngorm mountains seeming to touch the sky not far beyond. We all have places that, when we return to them, fill our souls. My musical moment of 2012 (leaving aside the premiere of my oratorio *17 Days* by Crouch End Festival Chorus at the Barbican, of course!), is the 'encore' track from the Elias Quartet's recital of Haydn and Schumann (Wigmore Hall Live, 10/12). The piece is called *Lament for Mulroy* and is only five minutes long. It is so modestly offered up to the listener that it's not even mentioned on the cover of the CD, where Haydn and Schumann take pride of place. Well, move over Haydn and Schumann, because for me this little piece by the Elias's second violinist Donald Grant gets to the heart of why music is so valuable, why we all have to make as much room in our lives as we can for it. *Lament for Mulroy* is unspeakably moving, as close to musical perfection as anything I've heard on disc all year. It takes me back to the Highlands.



A composer in their midst: the Elias Quartet



Vreli (Jessica Muirhead) and Sali (John Bellemer)

Antony Craig

Production editor

Why does 20th-century English opera (Britten excluded) get such short shrift? In November I saw a rare and wonderful *Pilgrim's Progress* at ENO and earlier in the year I took delight (on CD) in the mellow beauty of another Vaughan Williams opera, *Sir John in Love*.

At least ENO is doing its bit – as is little Wexford, whose opera festival I had the pleasure of visiting for the first time in the autumn, seduced by the prospect of seeing Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet*. Stephen Medcalf's loving treatment opened my eyes to the magnificence of an opera which, while not to everyone's taste, doesn't deserve to remain (as it has for more than a hundred years) outside the margins of the operatic canon. This spellbinding production (conducted by Rory Macdonald) was brilliantly realised and introduced me to the exceptionally talented soprano Jessica Muirhead, who has understudied leading roles at Glyndebourne without actually getting to perform them. She completely inhabited the role of Vreli and has a beautiful clarity of tone. She sounds quite thrilling and I expect her to go to the very top. A real highlight of the year.

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Charlotte Smith

News editor

The most dazzling live event I witnessed this year was Quatuor Ebène performing 'Fiction', their programme of film, pop and jazz arrangements, at the Trondheim Chamber Music Festival in September. Before hardcore classical purists dismiss this as the 'soft' option, let me counter that these were no ordinary arrangements. Developed over some time, many of these striking, intricate and humorous interpretations appeared on the group's 2010 album of the same name – but several works have been added to the 'set list' since then.

It takes a lot to make your voice heard in a festival that includes grandstanding events such as outdoor music played on the high-wire strings of a giant cello, but for me the Ebène stole the show. The relaxed and intimate Dokkhuset club was packed with young and old for a performance that showcased not only the Ebène's blistering technique and showmanship but also ensemble-playing at its most democratic, allowing each member to take his turn in the spotlight. Joined by the sensitive percussion skills of Richard Héry, this was playing by turns masterful, emotional and a great deal of fun.



Quatuor Ebène: blistering technique



Robert Schumann: miraculous Piano Concerto

David Threasher

Sub-editor

My privileged dual role as critic and part-time sub-editor means that I gave you my silver-disc choice last month, so I'll recount a highlight from a different area of my musical activities this year. Schumann's Piano Concerto has been my favourite piece of music ever since I played second oboe in it with a provincial youth orchestra. A hand injury in the summer requiring a spot of physiotherapy coincided with periods of free time this autumn, so I disinterred my dog-eared and much scribbled-upon piano score of the Schumann and decided to relearn the solo part – a project initially commenced during student years two decades ago but abandoned when musicology became more of a pressing concern than performance.

It's been great to realise – as the rust gradually falls away – that I still have the remains of a technique, and to reacquire myself intimately with the inner workings of this miraculous concerto. I'm nearly up to a decent speed with the finale now – at least I've got it to a tempo far in excess of that surely otiose metronome marking.

Lynsey Row

Art editor

When I was at school, I played the clarinet in the Stan Hacking Concert Band. Stan, conductor of the Concert Band and an ex-Royal Marines Band Colour Sergeant, was an incredible band leader, music teacher and friend. A challenging but enjoyable part of our repertoire was Leonard Bernstein's seminal *West Side Story* score. With this in mind, I was excited to hear that the Royal Albert Hall was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the film with a screening of the remastered version in high-definition in summer 2012, the score played live by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra.

Conducted by Jayce Ogren, the beautifully precise and irresistibly vibrant live soundtrack gave the classic film a whole new lease of life, bringing it off the screen and creating a deeper connection with the audience. This new trend of film with live orchestra never fails to satisfy me: I also saw Fritz Lang's cult 1927 sci-fi film *Metropolis* at the Roundhouse back in 2010, with the original score performed live by the London Contemporary Orchestra conducted by Hugh Brunt – that, too, was absolutely stunning.



West Side Story at the Royal Albert Hall

Andrew Everard

Audio editor

I've long been a fan of Norwegian label 2L, not least for its outstanding sound quality; but even by its own standards, its two-disc 'Souvenir' project is remarkable. Lovingly recorded by a team led by founder Morten Lindberg, the programme of Nielsen and Tchaikovsky has the Trondheim Soloists placed in mixed voices, creating a fascinating 'soundscape'.

You can buy the music in various formats, but the version to have (if you own suitable equipment) is the Blu-ray audio release, bringing together both discs in a choice of stereo and surround formats up to Auro-3D 9.1-channel (alongside 5.1- and 7.1-channel DTS-HD Master Audio). I'll be taking a closer look at this recording next month but for now I'd challenge anyone to experience the palpable presence of the acoustic out of which the opening of the Tchaikovsky *Serenade* soars and not be entirely thrilled then swept away by the music. Even now, many months after Lindberg first invited me to download the files, playing this set still makes me shiver with delight.



The Trondheim Soloists seated around the surround microphone array in Selbu Church, Norway



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Vinci: Artaserse; Jaroussky/Cencic/Behle/Concerto Koln/Fasolis Virgin 602 8692 (3 CDs) £19.99

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Beethoven: Symphonies 5 & 7; ORR/Gardiner Soli Deo Gloria SDG 717 £12.99	Knussen: Autumnal/etc; BBC SO/Knussen/etc NMCD 178 £11.99
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"Offenbach's Secret" (Film by Istvan Szabo) Euroarts 2012488 £19.99	"Berlin Opera Night"; cond Runnicles (2011) Euroarts 205 9008 £17.99

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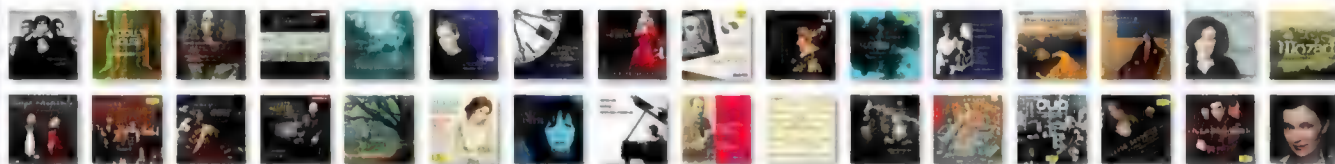
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GRAMOPHONE *Reviews*

January 2013



Martha Argerich and Alexander Vedernikov play Schumann's Piano Concerto in Lugano ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 57](#)

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GRAMOPHONE *Reviewers*



Andrew Achenbach

Music was everywhere in the crowded Achenbach household and records were a boyhood fascination. 'A Treasury of English Music' played by Boult and the LPO on Decca Ace of Clubs was one of the first LPs I wore out; it instilled within me a passion for British music that persists to this day (I do loathe being pigeonholed, mind you). Unlike my eldest brother Chris, who attended Chetham's School in Manchester, I revealed no great instrumental prowess, so it was off to King's College in London for me to study German, followed by a five-year stint in assorted BBC music libraries. I have been fortunate to be able to pursue a freelance career as a record critic, annotator

and programmer for more than two decades now, an early highlight of which was working in an editorial capacity on *Classics* magazine with Rob Cowan. As a *Gramophone* reviewer, I still revel in the creative stimulation, spiritual nourishment and – above all – shock of the unexpected afforded by comparative listening. These days, I'm living contentedly in Norwich with my wife Emily DeVoto, whom I met during the 2009 Obama inauguration in Washington, DC. Walking (especially along the north Norfolk coast), food, real ale and cinema are particular obsessions, extracting the best sound from lossless files through my recently acquired wireless server another.

Andrew Achenbach

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* Contributing Editor

Recording of the Month



'Vinci's reputation is emphatically rehabilitated by this advocacy of Artaserse masterminded by Max Emanuel Cencic'

David Vickers greets a landmark premiere of a countertenor-rich opera

Vinci

Artaserse

Philippe Jaroussky countertenor.....Artaserse

Max Emanuel Cencic countertenor.....Mandane

Daniel Behle ten.....Artabano

Franco Fagioli countertenor.....Arbace

Valer Barna-Sabadus countertenor.....Semira

Yuriy Mynenko countertenor.....Megabise

Swiss Radio and Television Chorus; Concerto Köln /

Diego Fasolis

Virgin Classics © 602869-2 (3h 8' • DDD • S/T/V)

The rehabilitation of Leonardo Vinci (c1696-1730) has been long overdue. He trained at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo in Naples, where he made his debut as an opera composer in 1719. During the next decade Vinci worked for prestigious opera houses in Rome and Venice, and his swift ascent coincided with that of his influential literary collaborator Metastasio. Their ambitious new serious opera *Artaserse* was unveiled on February 4, 1730, at Rome's Teatro delle Dame, where it was performed by an all-male cast on account of the peculiarities of papal dislike of women appearing publicly onstage in the Eternal City (a different setting of Metastasio's new libretto was unveiled in Venice only seven days later by Hasse,

whose cast included women). At the apex of his meteoric career Vinci died suddenly in Naples, aged only about 34 and under suspicious circumstances; it was rumoured he had been poisoned.

Posterity has been unkind to the Neapolitan master, although he was esteemed highly by his contemporaries Vivaldi and Handel, who retained 20 of Vinci's numbers when he adapted *Artaserse* for the London pasticcio *Arbace* in 1734. The odd aria and a few chamber cantatas have been recorded here and there, and some inroads were made by Antonio Florio's recordings of the comic opera *Li zite 'ngalera* (Opus 111) and, more recently, *La Rosmira fedele* (mistitled *Partenope* on its premiere recording – Dynamic, 10/12). Now the composer's visibility and reputation are emphatically rehabilitated by this advocacy of *Artaserse* masterminded by Max Emanuel Cencic.

The only mild obstacle to dramatic clarity during this outstanding performance is Cencic's determination to replicate Vinci's all-male cast by initiating a countertenor-laden experiment; he chooses for himself the 'prima donna' role of Mandane. To be fair, the five countertenors are cast shrewdly to sound dissimilar; but Philippe Jaroussky's

sweet Artaserse is more effeminate than his love interest Semira (the gutsier Valer Barna-Sabadus). Perhaps seeing drag queens onstage would clear things up but the plethora of countertenors singing varying gender roles makes it essential to follow Metastasio's fine libretto closely: it is an archetypally tangled political thriller that offers scope for dramatically powerful scenes exploring themes of injustice, loyalty, treachery and love that appealed to many composers for years to come (Metastasio later affectionately called *Artaserse* 'the most fortunate of all my children'). Arbace loves Mandane, the daughter of the disapproving Persian king Xerxes, who has banished him from the palace at Susa. He returns secretly to see his lover but is inadvertently framed for his father Artabano's assassination of the king. The new monarch Artaserse loves his friend Arbace's sister Semira, and is embroiled in political difficulties and emotional conflicts when the deceiver Artabano plots to overthrow him. The sinister schemes of the traitor are foiled eventually by the honest hero Arbace, who until then has been torn between pressures of filial duty, friendship and love.

An abundance of masterfully contrasted arias poignantly convey the emotional



Pacing: Diego Fasolis ensures that the drama of *Artaserse* is 'spot-on'

conditions of the respective protagonists. Arbace's anguish upon discovering his father Artabano's assassination of the king ('Fra cento affanni') is sung spiritedly by Franco Fagioli. Act 1 climaxes with a fantastic sequence of concise arias: the unjustly accused Arbace is renounced robustly by his treacherous father, reluctantly by his tender sister and venomously by his lover Mandane ('Dimmi che un empio sei', featuring biting strings and spectacular coloratura from Cencic), after which the bereft hero sings an emotive accompanied recitative and powerful *aria di bravura* with potent low horn notes ('Vo solcando un mar crudele'). During Act 2, trumpets and timpani gang up with Artabano to bully his daughter to accept a man she does not love ('Amalo e se al tuo sguardo'), whereas the strings in Mandane's beguiling 'Se d'un amor tiranno' suggest she is struggling to relinquish her love for the man she believes murdered her father. The prison scene that begins Act 3 indicates that Vinci was one of the finest opera composers of his age.

Concerto Köln deliver orchestral accompaniments with their customary

punchiness, although I doubt that a bassoon really played during all of the villainous tenor's recitatives. The entire cast produces exceptionally good singing. Cencic and Jaroussky give a masterclass of dramatic countertenor singing, and Valer Barna-Sabadus and Yuriy Mynenko (the dastardly Megabise) are not far behind. Other listeners might find Fagioli's mannered vowels more pleasing than I do but the technical assurance of his coloratura is impressive. The lone tenor Daniel Behle brings the treasonous Artabano vividly to life and offers excellent declamation of Metastasio's poetry.

Diego Fasolis ensures that the pacing of the drama is spot-on, and it is intriguing to experience an original and unabridged setting of a Metastasio libretto that reveals fascinating virtues and eloquently developed ideas in the dramatic poetry. The discography of front-rank native Italian opera composers of the early 18th century has been woefully inadequate since Edison first tinkered with sound recording (Handel was not Italian and some might not count Vivaldi as front-rank) but it is bolstered immeasurably by this sensational landmark recording. **G**

Listening points

Your guide to the set's memorable moments

Disc 1, track 1: Sinfonia

The thrilling Sinfonia, featuring splendid trumpets and braying horns, is played with thumping energy by Concerto Köln. Vinci springs some engaging surprises.

Disc 1, track 17, 1'20": 'Mori, Semira'

Artaserse's bitter remorse at having taken misleading advice to have his brother Dario put to death is chillingly conveyed in an accompanied recitative.

Disc 2, track 2: 'Rendimi il caro amico'

Jaroussky is always sublime in slow music but he also performs the more extrovert coloratura divisions with peerless clarity in this regal trumpet aria.

Disc 2, tracks 15-17: 'Per quel paterno amplesso' - 'Va' tra le selve Ircane'

Fagioli sings sweetly when the condemned hero Arbace is led away after a trumped-up trial at the hands of his guilty father. However, the scene is stolen by Mandane in her outburst at the hypocritical Artabano, sung spectacularly by Cencic.

Disc 3, tracks 1-3: Act 3 scene 1

The opening of Act 3 progresses from the imprisoned Arbace's hopeless desolation to his extravagant expression of gratitude to his magnanimous deliverer Artaserse - a coloratura aria with quavering strings and punctuating horns.

Orchestral



Edward Seckerson on Bruckner's Seventh from Donald Runnicles:

'Everything has a naturalness of phrasing that often finds greater kinship with Schubert than Wagner' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



Rob Cowan on Ballets Russes scores from SWR in Freiburg:

'Sheherazade sent me to sleep three times... the commissioning Sultan would have been delighted' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**

JS Bach

'The Celebration'

Brandenburg Concertos, BWV1046-51

Die Freitagsakademie

Winter & Winter © 2 910 194-2 (103' • DDD)



'Concept' Brandenburgs from deluxe label Winter & Winter

There is much documentary evidence about Bach's day-to-day dealings but not much of it biographical, no diaries and few reflections beyond the ephemeral. Die Freitagsakademie reimagine history by presenting a performance of the *Brandenburg Concertos* as part of a midsummer party during Bach's time at Cöthen. The props include barking dogs, bells, gongs and general hubbub between and during movements, as well as fireworks which – beware – if you start at tr 9 of disc 1 (No 3) sound like distortion.

It's hard to ascertain whether the purpose of this lavish presentation is to provide a contextual 'snapshot' of Bach's six years in a (mainly) happy court between 1717 and 1723 or to enhance the enjoyment and understanding of these six great works. Sadly, it does neither in equal measure. Bach's fictional diary in the booklet is too slight and shallow to illuminate the composer's creative environment.

How does one assess a performance when the listener is incessantly distracted by extraneous noises? Only occasionally does a moment's peace lead one to the music and an appreciation of the Minuet and Trio of No 1 (and some wonderfully visceral horns) or the thrill of the chase in the last movement of No 3. On the whole, the recessed 'ballroom' acoustic serves the ensemble well but there is often inadequate definition across all frequencies, particularly in a top-heavy No 5.

More generally, the performances, while sleek, are uninspiringly pedestrian. In the case of Nos 3, 4 and 6, the effect of listlessness is derived from unsettled tempi in the opening movements. There are some creditable performances within, notably from agile solo players, but this is concert music whose kaleidoscopic potential should open all sorts of doors for performers, however familiar the territory. Winter &

Winter's 'catalogue de luxe' is often a joy to behold but this is a project whose artistic core lacks the necessary depth, character and interest to rival the best versions from recent years, such as Pinnock, Kuijken, Gardiner and Abbado – and that's before the fireworks blow the last movement of No 4 into next Tuesday. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Selected comparisons:

European Brandenburg Ens, Pinnock (3/08) (AVIE) AV2119

English Baroque Sols, Gardiner (1/10) (SDG) SDG707

Petite Bande, Kuijken (11/10) (ACCE) ACC24224

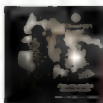
Orch Mozart, Abbado (6/11) (DG) 477 8908GH2

JS Bach

Keyboard Concertos – BWV1052; BWV1055; BWV1057; BWV1058

Retrospect Ensemble / Matthew Halls *hpd*

Linn © CKD410 (64' • DDD/DSO)



After the oratorios, Halls turns to the keyboard concertos

The brightness and rightness of the sound is what strikes you immediately about this new recording of four of Bach's seven solo harpsichord concertos. Many other recordings make you aware by sheer awkwardness of balance that they are adaptations for particular circumstances of concertos originally written for other instruments, leaving you reluctantly to conclude that perhaps they never quite worked for Bach either. Not so here. The harpsichord has tone and resonance, yet is not so closely miked that the strings sound like they have been banished to an outer realm; instead they have pleasing presence, offering a rich complementary texture in which you can hear every line.

And what better piece to demonstrate that than the joyous BWV1057? About as familiar a Bach work as there is in its original form as *Brandenburg No 4*, it emerges in this version, in which the harpsichord replaces the violin, in a refreshing new light, especially in the marvel of life-enhancing counterpoint that is its finale. Further strength to the harpsichord's arm as rightful part-owner of the piece comes in the moment when we might least expect it – the passage of dizzying violin bariolage in the *Brandenburg* finale, which is here transformed

into a rattling keyboard tremolo and rendered totally convincing by Matthew Halls's muscular playing. The same applies in the bariolage passage in BWV1058, adapted from the *A minor Violin Concerto*.

These are the first two concertos on this disc and although the energy levels are not sustained right through – a slightly rushed BWV1052 in particular lacks some of its usual demonic hauteur in the outer movements and its brooding, dramatic inevitability in the central one – this is a joyful and invigorating release all the same. I look forward to more. **Lindsay Kemp**

CPE Bach

'Keyboard Concertos, Vol 18'

Keyboard Concertos, Wq43 – No 1, H471; No 2, H472; No 3 H473; No 4, H474

Concerto Armonico Budapest / Miklós Spányi *hpd*
BIS © BIS-CD1787 (68' • DDD)

CPE Bach

'Piano Concertos, Vol 2'

Keyboard Concertos – Wq14 H417; Wq17 H420; Wq43/4 H474

Michael Rische *pf*

Leipzig Chamber Orchestra / Morten Schuldt-Jensen
Hänssler Classic © CD98 653 (57' • DDD)



Contrasting instrument choices in CPE Bach from Spányi and Rische

It must have been a touch galling for Miklós Spányi, as he prepared to record these four works for Vol 18 of his complete cycle of CPE Bach's keyboard concertos towards the end of 2011, to see Andreas Staier and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra taking a *Gramophone* Award for their powerful recording of the full set of six Wq43 concertos. Spányi's project – concurrent with his survey of the complete solo keyboard music – has integrities of its own, however, and his attention to detail when it comes to choosing instruments is one of them. Here he uses a copy of a 1745 Dulcken, being the closest he could get hold of, he says, to the late English harpsichords which, with their big sound and armoury of sound-changing tricks, were the state-of-the-art



Frans Brüggen: voyaging to the vortex of Beethoven

models in the last battles against the emerging piano. Staier used a German harpsichord which positively bristled with stops but Spányi steals a march by attaching swell shutters to his instrument (don't worry, it's quite authentic!), thus making possible *crescendos* and *diminuendos*. It's a slightly strange sensation when you first hear it, but the whole exercise is typical of the loving care which Spányi has given to his recordings. The performances themselves are very good, with neat, crisp fingerwork from Spányi expertly balanced with a one-to-a-part orchestra which is clean and efficient, if not in the same league of slick precision and energy as the FBO.

No less enthusiastic about CPE Bach is pianist Michael Rische, who has produced a second volume of concertos for Hänssler, though with rather different results. Rische's desire is to claim the works for the modern piano – and it is a churl who would want to stop him – but I cannot feel he has made much of a case for it in the three works recorded here, two from the 1740s and one from the 1772 set. Quite simply, it is surprising just how bland and heavy a piano can sound in this music and the elaborate right-hand figuration in some of the slow movements – easy and elegant on a harpsichord – comes across as fidgety and

awkward. That puts it at odds with the stylish playing of the modern-instrument orchestra, but Rische's decision to perform Wq43/4 as a solo because Bach wrote out reductions of the ritornellos for the player's convenience makes no more sense. Spányi and Staier are more securely on the right track. **Lindsay Kemp**

Wq43 – selected comparison:

Staier, Freiburg Baroque Orch

(6/11) (HARM) HMC90 2083/4

Beethoven

Symphonies Nos 1-9

Rebecca Nash *sop* **Wilke te Brummelstroete** *mez*

Marcel Beekman *ten* **Michael Tews** *bass* **Laurens**

Collegium and Cantorij, Rotterdam; Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century / Frans Brüggen

Glossa (M) (S) (D) GCDSA921116 (5h 58' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live in Rotterdam, October 2011



Brüggen, his orchestra, and the symphonies played live

If Haydn spoke his last word on the symphony in 1795, Beethoven's First five years later is no mere extension but a big leap forwards – or so it appears to Frans Brüggen and predicated by the opening chords, sonorous yet distinct but of a power that expands into the main movement

and its forceful recapitulation. Cutting *sforzandos* from the horns between 4'05" and 4'16", timpani a presence beyond that, uncover unexpected undertones in the development of the slow movement too. Brüggen's ear for instrumental balance is unerring. No strand is ignored if it has contextual significance. The *Allegretto* of the Seventh is an example of how entrancing such significance can also be, the orchestra showing here, as everywhere, real mettle in reproducing the subtleties inherent in Brüggen's understanding of the music. But the recording is a strange mixture of clarity and congestion, full-bodied and disembodied sound with moments of transient distortion or boomy reverberation.

Yet Brüggen's message, interpreted from uncorrupted texts, gets through, every repeat except one (in the third movement of the Seventh) observed. But he reserves judgement about Beethoven's metronome markings, even totally repudiating speeds that reflect the brilliance, vivacity and humour of the Eighth. Slow burn is substituted for swift cut and thrust in the first movement of the Third but momentum falters at dramatic points; and Brüggen disrupts the beginning of the finale by holding back the tempo of the theme after the rushing introduction. Still, when he meets

Beethoven even halfway, the results are remarkable, as in the Second. It'll be curmudgeonly not to respond to Brüggén's own response to the rhetoric of the outer movements or the nuanced shading and shaping of the *Larghetto*. If he is a touch tame in the opening movement of the Fifth, he makes amends in a meticulously detailed *Scherzo* graphically leading into a finale, fiercely exciting at a tempo six points higher than specified. Brüggén is his own man in this matter. But when his decisions come close to or virtually equal Beethoven's requirements, another dimension opens. Not one simply covered by pace but by a sense of space at any pace that only an elite conductor can achieve. The coherent bass-line in the opening *Adagio* of the Fourth underpins a consciousness of the music lifting upwards, conjuring 'the sky-dome vastness of the dark introduction' (Donald Tovey), a vastness that continues into the *Allegro vivace* with no unseemly haste at the composer's marking of *mimim=80*. Similar qualities abound in the Sixth, in other movements not discussed, and exaltedly in the Ninth. Brüggén strips it of the overbearing bombast encrusted across generations and, in a recreation of beauty, both chaste and potent, phrases curve according to melodic or harmonic progressions, paragraphs unfold in long-breathed lines, changes in metre are seamlessly accommodated. Soloists convey musical substance through clearly enunciated words; the chorus does likewise without drowning the orchestra. This is Brüggén's voyage to the vortex of Beethoven's last symphony. Go with him for a rare emotional encounter. **Nalen Anthoni**

Selected comparison:

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly
(A/11) (DECC) 478 3492DH5

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 5, Op 67; No 7, Op 92

Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique /

John Eliot Gardiner

Soli Deo Gloria © SDG717 (72' • DDD)

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, New York,
November 16, 2011



**WQXR's live recording of
the ORR at Carnegie Hall**

So palpable is the excitement of these live performances that it almost comes as a shock that the applause has been excised. I was out of my seat at the end of the Seventh and I can only assume that a patch was made of the final pages, because no audience could conceivably have contained itself. From the very start, the cut-to-the-bone immediacy of the sound puts you up close and personal to the performance, lending a granite strength to the crunch of those chords and the rosiny resilience of those

striding string scales. The dancing flute theme is really up-tempo and the blare of natural horns at the *tutti* brings an earthiness, a rawness, to the proceedings. The dance starts here, the 'apotheosis' comes later.

John Eliot Gardiner and his resplendent Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique rejoice here in the sheer physicality of the music, the bounding rhythms, the stomping accents. There's an implicit delirium in this music that would culminate in a dance of death were it not so life-affirming. Gardiner's tempo for the second-movement *Allegretto* is significantly slower than the metronome (as witness Chailly) but the relationship between the wind and strings (period instruments far more equal in the balance) and the give and take between subject and countersubject lends an expressive mobility. There's still an air of slow dance about it, breathlessly superseded by the *scherzo* with its whiplash reflexes (so much speedier with a leaner, meaner ensemble) and the excitement of sustained natural trumpets in the Trio. The hair-raising reiterations of the finale, driven to the point of exhaustion – the most exhilarating kind of exhaustion – are accentuated by the immediacy of the sound, and the penultimate piledriving climax and coda are absolutely thrilling, with brazen horns again dominating.

The Fifth registers marginally lower on the Richter scale but is again characterised by a propulsive energy. The plangency of that isolated moment of reflection for solo oboe in the first movement is eerily poignant here and I love, too, the way Gardiner brings home the unforgiving militarism of the piece, the way the martial brassiness of trumpets and drums pompously interrupts the homely variations of the second movement. The roar into the light of the finale is tremendous, still more the mounting jubilation as a gruff, overfed bassoon signals the C major home stretch.

These are the kind of performances that remind us of what a revolution of reassessment period-instrument bands provoked. The shock of newness in Beethoven prevails.

Edward Seckerson

Selected comparison:

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly
(A/11) (DECC) 478 3492DH5

Beethoven · Kuhlau

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15^a

Kuhlau Piano Concerto, Op 7^b

Marianna Shirinyan *pf* Copenhagen Philharmonic

Orchestra / ^aMichael Francis, ^bRolf Gupta

Orchid © ORC100025 (67' • DDD)



**Shirinyan plays two C major
concertos in Copenhagen**

Kuhlau was not the luckiest man on earth. He lost an eye in childhood, had to escape over the

border from Hamburg to Copenhagen to avoid conscription (despite being half-blind), while a fire caused a serious chest infection from which he never recovered, dying at 45 (and also destroyed his second piano concerto). In the interim, though, Denmark adopted him as its own and he enjoyed a successful career as a composer/pianist. His Op 7 Concerto, written in 1811, is a fascinating one-off in the history of the piano concerto and Marianna Shirinyan has come up with a neat piece of programming, coupling it with Beethoven's First, on which it's unashamedly modelled. Bad news for Kuhlau, you might surmise, but not a bit of it. It's as if he has taken the shell of the work, scooped out its innards and given it a completely new filling.

Kuhlau begins with a motto markedly similar to the one that opens Beethoven's concerto, following it with a similarly extended orchestral *tutti* before allowing the piano to take centre stage, just as Beethoven does, with a solo passage. Much of the effect of his writing lies in the dramatic contrasts of dynamic and texture, and Shirinyan understands this well, bringing greater vivacity to the virtuoso passagework than Amalie Malling on Chandos. The slow movement (in A flat, like Beethoven's) is striking for its harmonic adventurousness and its presaging of Chopin in some of its turns of phrase. Shirinyan and Gupta choose a flowing tempo that is arguably more telling than Malling's rapt approach. Admittedly, Shirinyan isn't blessed with the most beautiful of instruments and some of the duetting with the wind could be more characterful but she makes a very strong case for this surprisingly unsung piece. The finale, with its abrupt changes of direction, sounds for all the world like Haydn shifted forwards half a century. Could its humorous harmonic swerves have been played up even more? Possibly; but the dynamic extremes are well captured by pianist and orchestra.

As for the Beethoven, it can't really compete with Andsnes's recent recording with the Mahler CO, not least for the intricate interplay of soloist and ensemble. But Shirinyan's energy and the clarity of her fingerwork are infectious none the less. **Harriet Smith**

Beethoven – selected comparison:

Andsnes, Mahler CO (11/12) (SONY) 88725 42058-2

Kuhlau – selected comparison:

Malling, Danish Nat Rad SO, Scherwandt
(CHAN) CHAN9699

Bruckner

Symphony No 7

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /

Donald Runnicles

Hyperion © CDA67916 (60' • DDD)



**Hyperion tapes BBC SSO's first
Bruckner for three decades**

There are those who attend the opening of this piece as they might the opening of *Parsifal* – slowly, hieratically. Not Donald Runnicles. The beauty is in the humanity and from the moment of its appearance he has the longer view of the cello-led melody in mind. Indeed, the defining character of his Bruckner on this showing is the singing fluency of the line. Everything has shape and purpose and a naturalness of phrasing that often finds greater kinship with Schubert than with Wagner.

All the lyric ideas are kept moving, brassy proclamations carry us effortlessly towards and across even the most problematic transition, and the atmosphere is poetic without being precious or indeed pious. That extraordinary moment in the first movement where the second part of the great cello theme re-emerges against a tremulous *crescendo* of violin and timpani becomes something very personal and carries an emotional intensity far removed from the merely mythic. And then to the great *Adagio*, which is possessed here of an intimacy that one might not normally associate with it. It is tender and communicative and, if you like, more human-scaled. Bruckner, the man, is not lost in the grandeur of his symphonic landscape.

And Bruckner, the outdoor man, is earthily conveyed in the exhilaration of the *Scherzo* and the bluff assertiveness of the finale. They 'connect' here in an interesting way, the latter less portentous and more of a cosmic dance than it sometimes sounds; the flip-side of the *Scherzo*. The playing of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra is terrifically robust but deeply felt, too.

Those who favour a grander, more expansive, more monolithic approach to this music may find the scale of Runnicles's reading a shade diminishing. But be in no doubt that it is thoughtful and radiant and eminently musical, and that the modesty as well as the humanity of Bruckner's vision is faithfully realised. **Edward Seckerson**

Dvořák

'Symphonies, Vol 3'

Symphonies – No 3, Op 10 B34; No 6, Op 60 B112

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / José Serebrier

Warner Classics © 2564 65775-3 (80' • DDD)



Serebrier's south-coast Dvořák cycle continues

Checking the booklet timing, the Sixth Symphony's first movement brought an instant smile to my face, assuming as I did (rightly) that Serebrier had opted to observe the exposition repeat. Without it – and we're talking a pretty expansive exposition here – the movement's structure is compromised. The reading itself is energetic and well paced, though I would have preferred a less marked broadening when



'Grand Lisztian flourishes': Godard's Piano Concerto No 2 from Victor Sangiorgio and the RSNO under Martin Yates

Dvořák has his principal theme blossom among the full orchestra. In this one respect at least, Vladimír Válek on his Supraphon recording with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra – part of a variable but generally underrated complete cycle – is rather more subtle. Then again, Serebrier takes an intimate view of the *Adagio*, bringing it in line with some of Dvořák's finest chamber music: the gentle fanning among winds and brass that opens the movement is a good example of what I mean and so is the expressive take-up when the strings enter. Buoyant rhythms keep the last two movements alive and dancing, with excellent playing from the Bournemouth Symphony, though readers who, like me, cannot hear this music without the verdant profile of Czech woodwinds springing to mind will still want to retain their Šejna, Neumann, Ančerl, Mackerras and Válek recordings.

Right from the opening bars, the Third Symphony enjoys a warm blend of instrumental sonorities, though Václav Smetáček's premiere stereo recording captures more of the music's Mendelssohnian lightness. By the time they reach the last three or so minutes of the first movement, Serebrier and his players seem just a little weighed down by what are admittedly some of Dvořák's least compelling arguments, though in the Symphony's most blatantly awkward passage (involving brass and woodwinds flailing around uncomfortably at 7'02" and a little beyond into the finale, where Válek, at a significantly slower tempo, rather loses the thread), they sensibly keep up the pace. Still, what a rich trove of loveable ideas this symphony is and anyone learning the work from this recording will certainly enjoy its sunniest side. A good CD, the Sixth possibly the best performance so far in Serebrier's evolving Dvořák symphony cycle. **Rob Cowan**

Sym No 3 – selected comparison:

Prague SO, Smetáček (SUPR) SU3968-2

Syms – selected comparison:

Prague Rad SO, Válek (SUPR) SU3802-2

Godard

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 148^a. Fantaisie persane, Op 152^a. Jocelyn – Two Suites. Overture des Guelphes

^aVictor Sangiorgio *pf*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7291 (79' • DDD)



The Second Concerto on Dutton's second Godard foray

As on the earlier Dutton disc of Godard's music (11/11), none of these world premiere recordings are of forgotten masterpieces but they consistently show the hand of an assured craftsman, a fecund melodist full of arresting ideas albeit in a harmonically conservative idiom. The curtain-raiser is a case in point: the Overture to Godard's second opera, *Les Guelphes*, completed in 1882 but not premiered until 1902, seven years after the composer's early death. The funeral-march opening is contrasted with a spirited and gripping central section that vividly represents the composer's flair for dramatically contrasted passages in colourful orchestral garb. The RSNO's suave strings and brass respond magnificently.

Godard's four-movement Piano Concerto No 2, while perhaps not quite as alluring as No 1, shares with its predecessor grand Lisztian flourishes, sparkling Mendelssohnian figurations and a nod to Saint-Saëns, including in the *Scherzo* a brief imitation of the galumphing waltz subject from his concerto in the same key. Victor Sangiorgio is at one with the idiom, able to charm and barnstorm with

the best of them, sound engineer Dexter Newman capturing the full-bodied bass of the piano in a warm, spacious soundscape. The *Fantaisie persane* for piano and orchestra (1884) is another attractive rarity, a companion to Godard's other excursion into then fashionable orientalism, the *Symphonie orientale* heard on Vol 1. The two suites from *Jocelyn* include, of course, Godard's big hit, the *Berceuse*, played with understated eloquence by cellist Aleksei Kiseliiov. Full marks to Martin Yates and Dutton for another delightful voyage of discovery. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Handel

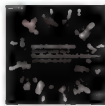
Twelve Concerti grossi, Op 6 HWV319-30

Combattimento Consort Amsterdam /

Jan Willem de Vriend *vn*

Challenge Classics (C) (3) (4) CC72570

(154' • DDD/DSD)



De Vriend follows Beethoven with Handel's landmark Op 6

Combattimento Consort Amsterdam has achieved respectable success with stylistically accomplished performances of Baroque repertoire using predominantly modern instruments. This is only discernible if one listens carefully to the tone of the oboes or the timbre of the concertino violins in these performances of Handel's *Twelve Grand Concertos*. Moreover, the use of modern strings and woodwind is by no means a disadvantage because there are some salient aspects of these performances that are closer to historically informed practice than those one hears from some period-instrument sets. For instance, Jan Willem de Vriend correctly employs two harpsichords and theorbo (chitarrone, to be exact), and also includes the optional oboe parts Handel added to four of the concertos (given plenty of presence by four oboists instead of merely two). Such closer fidelity to the constitution of Handel's orchestra gives us vivid sonorities lacking from some of the finest period-instrument bands, such as the Avison Ensemble (whose subtler Linn recording uses fewer of everything).

The concertino group is a revolving door of seven different violinists: the solo passages during the *Allegro* in No 2 convey virtuoso excitement and the concertino fiddlers scrape eloquently while the charismatic droning bass has rustic directness in the *Polonaise* of No 3. There are a few isolated disappointments: the gorgeous *Larghetto affettuoso* in No 6 is unfortunately muscular, the affectionate *Musette* does not offer enough sentimentality and the opening of No 5 would have benefited from a lighter touch (such as that applied by Andrew Manze and the AAM). However, much here is enjoyable: the *Allemande* has the air of a solemn courtly dance and the *Siciliana* is

exquisitely played during No 8, the *Largos* in Nos 7 and 9 are judiciously elegant, the penultimate *Allegro* of No 6 achieves convivial extroversion and the *Andante larghetto e staccato* that begins No 11 is gently playful. There are so many facets to Handel's greatest orchestral masterpiece that few ensembles can capture them all but Combattimento Consort Amsterdam's pursuit of dramatic conviction and rich textures is commendable. **David Vickers**

Selected comparison:

Avison Ens, Bezansink (LINN) (10/10) CKD362

AAM, Manze (HARM) HMU90 7228/9

Knussen

Symphonies – No 2^a; No 3^b. Cantata^c.

Coursing^d. Ophelia Dances^e. Trumpets^f

^aElaine Barry, ^lLinda Hirst *sops* ^lMichael Collins,

^lIan Mitchell, ^lEdward Pillingier *cls* ^lNash Ensemble;

^{ade}London Sinfonietta / ^{ade}Oliver Knussen;

^bPhilharmonia Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas

NMC (C) NMCD175 (58' • DDD)

Recorded ^{be}1981, ^{acdf}1983

Knussen

Choral^g. Autumnal^h. Whitman Settings^c. Secret

Psalm^d. Prayer Bell Sketch^e. Violin Concerto^f.

Requiem: Songs for Sue^g. Ophelia's Last Dance^h

^{ca}Claire Booth *sop* ^lLella Josefowicz, ^{bd}Alexandra

Wood *vns* ^{bh}Huw Watkins, ^{ce}Ryan Wigglesworth *pls*

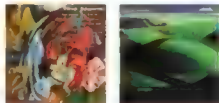
^gBirmingham Contemporary Music Group;

^{af}BBC Symphony Orchestra / ^{af}Oliver Knussen

NMC (C) NMCD178 (78' • DDD)

^fRecorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,

August 17, 2011



NMC marks Knussen's 60th with reissued symphonies and new chamber-vocal disc

The recordings on the first of these CDs, reissued to mark Oliver Knussen's 60th birthday, go back to the early 1980s, when he was working on the pair of Maurice Sendak operas (*Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*) that occupied him from 1979 to 1985. The Second Symphony, begun in 1970, is an especially vivid demonstration of how Knussen can complement a distinctive intensity, suited to the nightmarish imagery of Georg Trakl's verse, with the cooler yet no less deeply felt expressiveness appropriate to poems by Sylvia Plath. It is also illuminating to have Knussen's later Trakl setting, *Trumpets*, included here and to complement the Second Symphony with the powerfully opulent and evocative Third. These were always definitive performances and it is good to have them available once more – together with Knussen's brief yet knotty tribute to Elliott Carter at 70, *Coursing* – in expert remasterings.

The second disc, of new recordings, begins with the richly atmospheric *Choral* for orchestra

which Knussen wrote at the same time as the Second Symphony. Most of the remainder, including the longest piece, the 16-minute Violin Concerto (2001-02), is more recent and shows the composer further refining his responses to earlier 20th-century models as diverse as Berg, Debussy, Stravinsky and Britten. Like the Second Symphony, *Requiem: Songs for Sue* (2005-06) juxtaposes English with other languages – Spanish as well as German – and conveys an edgy blend of lamentation and celebration that is the more affecting for its directness and economy. Claire Booth brilliantly manages the music's kaleidoscopic shifts of rhetorical focus and is equally successful in the earlier group of Whitman settings, given here in the version with piano accompaniment.

The economical immediacy of one of the most striking works on the first disc, *Ophelia Dances*, is complemented on the second by *Ophelia's Last Dance*, which Knussen worked on as recently as 2010. This too has a valedictory quality offset by the kind of unobtrusive technical virtuosity in the music's construction that subtly belies the understated ruefulness of its atmosphere. The new recordings are all of high quality and include the composer's own notes. **Arnold Whittall**

Liszt

A Dante Symphony, S109^a. Orpheus, S98^b

^aMaîtrise de Caen; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Musicales Actes Sud (C) ASM07 (57' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^aLaon Cathedral, September 9, 2011;

^bThéâtre de Caen, December 4, 2011



Period-instrument reappraisal of Liszt continues in France

The obvious point of comparative reference for this excellent 2011 recording of Liszt's *Dante Symphony* is the equally excellent Martin Haselböck version from the previous year. Both feature period instruments, though listening to them side by side scotches any notion that the instruments themselves dictate anything beyond similar sound worlds. The opening pages are telling. Both performances are identical, tempo-wise, but it's Haselböck whose *crescendo*-ing timpani and tam-tam achieve the more devastating climax. Come the gruelling march-like motive at around 1'23", it's Roth who lets us hear the reptilian sting of a valveless horn and yet Haselböck more successfully stresses the loud jabbing horns a couple of minutes later. Haselböck is marginally more effective in the ethereal *Quasi andante* passage (7'18" on his disc but usefully tracked as a separate episode on Roth's), though Roth pushes for more speed and momentum in the *Allegro* roughly five minutes before the movement's close (15'20" on Haselböck's disc, tr 5 on Roth's). At the beginning of *Purgatorio*,



Expressive sensitivity no matter what the tempo: Pires, Abbado and Orchestra Mozart at the Konzerthaus, Bologna (see following page)

Roth's gently lapping strings are marginally better focused and I like the rise and fall of his orchestra's phrasing. Both start the *Lamentoso* section (so reminiscent of Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*) at roughly the same tempo, with Haselböck's horns ringing resplendent as the climax builds. In the *Magnificat*, at the halfway point (the word 'Magnificat'), Roth uses a solo boy's voice whereas Haselböck opts for the female chorus used throughout.

As to choices, Haselböck's offers an autumnal-sounding, well-integrated performance, convincingly conducted, well played and revealingly recorded, while Roth's Les Siècles option (recorded live, though you'd never guess) displays clearer contours and at times a more palpable sense of drama. Both do Liszt proud and both feature excellent fill-ups, Roth a warmly recorded and lyrically flowing account of the tone-poem *Orpheus* (which plays for 10'51", not 14'41" as stated on the box), Haselböck the far rarer *A la Chapelle Sixtine*, a melding of Allegri's *Miserere* and the late *Ave verum corpus* by Mozart. Either CD will do nicely but the explorer in me would tend to choose Haselböck as the period recommendation; if modern instruments are an essential prerequisite and you want a single CD, then Noseda, Barenboim and, if you can find him, Lehel on Hungaroton. **Rob Cowan**

Dante Sym – selected comparisons:

Budapest SO, Lebel (11/86) (HUNG) HCD11918

BPO, Barenboim (7/94*) (APEX) 2564 67301-2

BBC PO, Noseda (8/09) (CHAN) CHAN10524

Vienna Acad Orch, Haselböck (8/11) (NCA) 60234

Mahler

Symphony No 8, 'Symphony of a Thousand'

Manuela Uhl, Julianna Di Giacomo, Kiera Duffy *sops*

Anna Larsson, Charlotte Hellekant *contrs* Burkhard

Fritz *ten* Brian Mulligan *bar* Alexander Vinogradov *bass*

Niños Cantores *llu* Venezuela; Schola Cantorum de

Venezuela; Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra;

Simón Bolívar Youth Symphony Chorus and

Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela / Gustavo Dudamel

DG © DVD 073 4884GH; © 073 4890GH

(108' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA,

DTSS1 & PCM stereo • O). Recorded live at the Teatro Teresa Carreño, Caracas, Venezuela, 2012



The Americas united for Dudamel's symphony of 1400

With Mahler having held two prominent New York conductorships during the writing of his Eighth Symphony, many listeners at the piece's 1910 premiere commented on its 'American' dimensions. It's hardly surprising, then, that when Gustavo Dudamel was looking to make a larger statement, he turned

to Mahler's Eighth. With the most reliable attention-getter in the symphonic repertory, Dudamel sees Mahler's New World and raises him a continent.

It's difficult to overstate the magnitude here. Dudamel's 2012 Mahler Project, pairing the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra with a vast array of Venezuelan choristers, culminated with more than 1400 performers – a likely Guinness record – and sets a standard for cross-cultural music-making. Few events have been as primed for the camera yet prepared with such precision for the microphone.

Dudamel's charisma, supremely necessary in unifying his onstage forces, also proves photogenic. So too does the camera take the viewer to the most interesting vantage points. But, unlike Bernstein's 1975 outing with the Vienna Philharmonic (the obvious DVD comparison), this has CD-quality sound. In the accompanying documentary footage, Dudamel describes the piece as a 'choral orchestral' piece, rather than the other way around, which perfectly marks the strengths here. Rarely has a chorus come off so perfectly balanced, even in the softest sections.

Unfortunately, balance and precision do not always translate into depth. Dudamel's concept of Mahler has deepened noticeably



Resonant and deep: Vladimir Ashkenazy takes the Sydney Symphony through Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*

since his initial Fifth with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra but, once past the bombast of the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus', he still treats the music more as a series of effects than a fuller narrative. The camera that frames soprano Kiera Duffy's climatic cameo shifts the emotional tone far more effectively than the performance itself does.

The simple logistics of assembling these forces is laudable, as are the results. But with so impressive a gathering, one wishes they would have left a bit more room on the stage for Mahler.

Ken Smith

Selected comparison:

VPO, Bernstein (DG) 073 4091GH2

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 20, K466; No 27, K595

Maria João Pires *pf*

Orchestra Mozart / Claudio Abbado

DG 479 0075GH (60' • DDD)



Pires, Abbado and Mozart concertos from Bologna

No susurating strings at the beginning of K466. Claudio Abbado ensures that the syncopated rhythm, though soft, is precisely articulated, more so than is usually heard. Horns and trumpets don't pierce the texture; they simply reinforce it. Drama isn't over-pitched, tension doesn't slacken.

The conducting is intelligently alive, in quality reminiscent of Benjamin Britten (for Clifford Curzon) and Sándor Végh (for András Schiff). Maria João Pires enters into the prevailing mood, her artistry as thoughtful as of yore. The *Romanze* may seem fleet but the time signature is *alla breve* and Pires shows that expressive sensitivity isn't confined to a slow tempo; nor, conversely, that the agitated middle section needs to be speeded up to make its effect.

Recorded balance is particularly good. Some of the cadenzas – by Beethoven and Mozart – are, as usual, pulled forward but otherwise the piano is in proper perspective and the all-important woodwind aren't obscured. *Alla breve* returns in the *Larghetto* of K595; and if the chosen tempo (plus Pires's decorated lines) jolts traditional notions of valediction, it also supports a reasonable belief that the first two movements were written in 1788, the third maybe closer to the work's premiere in March 1791. Yet Pires and Abbado see this movement as pretty sprightly, with no premonitions of death. A mild reservation is that the orchestra is perhaps too large. Reduced forces might have enhanced the concerto's intimate character. It's a small point. These absorbing, penetrating performances deserve the widest currency.

Nalen Anthoni

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Curzon, ECO, Britten (5/05⁸) (DECC) 468 491-2DL2

Schiff, Salzburg Mozarteum Camerata Academica, Végh

(10/91⁸) (DECC) 448 140-2DM9

Pettersson

Symphony No 6

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra /

Christian Lindberg

BIS 479 0075GH (60' • DDD/DSO)

Pettersson

Six Songs^a. Barefoot Songs^b

Torsten Mossberg *ten* **Anders Karlqvist** *pf*

Sterling 479 0075GH (69' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded ^a1997, ^b2005



The next symphony from BIS's cycle and songs from practising doctor Mossberg

Allan Pettersson's Sixth Symphony (1963-66) is one of the middle-period symphonies (Nos 5-8) that to my mind represent his greatest achievement. I first encountered it on a live LP performance by the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra under Okko Kamu (2/77 – nla), I believe never reissued on CD. Nor has Kamu set down any other Pettersson works, a great shame as he evinced a more profound sympathy with and understanding of Pettersson's idiom than did Manfred Trojahn in his better-played but over-slow studio rival.

Lindberg's empathy for Pettersson's music is once again shown in the Sixth, where he catches its dark atmosphere to perfection, pacing its progress through the succession of climaxes superbly well. In tempi, Lindberg clips a minute off Trojahn though Kamu remains ideal, a fraction faster than the composer's indication of around 55'. Yet Lindberg's interpretation unites the best qualities of both accounts – Kamu's sensitivity to line and structure, well-defined impulsion and the Berlin orchestra's more disciplined playing. Kamu still gets greater immediacy but BIS's sensational sound with its huge dynamic range opens out details and perspectives not heard so cleanly hitherto. Try the passage starting just before 37'30", ushering in the paragraph that builds to the main climax, where Petterssonian restraint, Lindbergian acuity, the fine cor anglais-playing (of which more below) and BIS's superior sound combine.

Reviewing Monica Groop's and Cord Garben's disc of Pettersson's complete songs, Robert Layton found their charms wholly 'resistible' but acknowledged the quality of their advocacy. Torsten Mossberg's tenor voice gives these fine miniatures a different perspective, despite lacking Groop's radiance. His intonation is also suspect at times in the *Barefoot Songs* (1943-45), as for instance in the first chorus of the best-known, 'Blomma, säj!' ('Flower, tell me!'), though surer in the earlier set (1935). Mossberg and Karlqvist are slower by four minutes overall, mostly in a handful of individual tracks. With superior sound, Groop

and Garben remain first choice. The *Barefoot Songs* are ordered very differently in the two recordings but both conclude with 'Han ska släcka min lykta' ('He will extinguish my light'), the very song quoted in the Sixth Symphony's latter half, where its main theme is played so movingly by the Norrköping's cor anglais.

Guy Rickards

Sym No 6 – comparative version:

Deutsches SO Berlin, *Trojan* (4/07) (CPO) CPO999 247-2

Songs – comparative version:

Group, *Garben* (10/98) (CPO) CPO999 499-2

Prokofiev

Romeo and Juliet, Op 64

Sydney Symphony Orchestra / Vladimir Ashkenazy
Sydney Symphony Live (F) (2) SSO201205 (146' • DDD)



The Sydney Symphony return to Romeo and Juliet

Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* has fared well on disc, with multiple recordings of the suites and latterly of the complete ballet too. Although there remains a case for sticking with Gennady Rozhdestvensky's pioneering version, the most characterful of them all, or with Lorin Maazel's 1973 Cleveland account, the best-played, Valery Gergiev's recent release on LSO Live was widely felt to offer the ideal compromise.

Now Vladimir Ashkenazy joins him in that select group of conductors who have set down the full-length score more than once. Their affection for it is communicated in markedly different ways. Gergiev's theatrical instincts encourage him to energise the writing with results some find overstated. With Ashkenazy the notes are allowed their own space, sometimes too much, not that timings ever tell the whole story. He takes 5'51" over the familiar 'Dance of the Knights', Gergiev just 5'11". 'Juliet's Funeral', the penultimate number, is 5'44" under Gergiev, 7'14" in Sydney. The Australians have a richer, deeper hall resonance, giving a surprisingly analytical focus to the bass as well as echoing the nostalgic warmth and sincerity Ashkenazy brings to the ballet. The dynamic range is wider in London's crowded Barbican Hall, where Gergiev's more volatile sonorities can recede into inaudibility when not bludgeoning the listener.

Lest the Sydney Symphony strike you as unlikely casting in this music, I should mention that the ensemble has form, having provided live accompaniment to the 1966 film starring Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn (in 2004 under Carl Davis). Still, there are moments when its playing feels earthbound. The central 'Love Dance' surely works better with the LSO's more urgent churning and soaring. On the plus side, Ashkenazy deploys a viola d'amore, unavailable for his previous Decca recording, and he has a chamber organ in the 'Balcony Scene' where Gergiev resorts to

solo strings. While the Sydney Symphony's own-label packaging is more opulent than LSO Live's, its annotator is less reliable. We begin with the assertion that 'No orchestra in its right mind would perform Prokofiev's complete *Romeo and Juliet* ballet in the concert hall'. Perhaps it is the LSO's determination to prove the contrary that makes me incline to Gergiev's feistier view. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

Bolshoi Tb Orch, *Rozhdestvensky*

(9/61*) (MELO) MELCD100 0908

Cleveland Orch, *Maazel* (9/73*) (DECC) 452 970-2DF2

RPO, *Ashkenazy* (8/03) (DECC)

436 078-2DH2 or 478 3100DM2

LSO, *Gergiev* (3/10) (LSO) LSO0682

Prokofiev · Rimsky-Korsakov

'Diaghilev – Ballets Russes, Vol 8'

Prokofiev *Sythian Suite*, Op 20^b

Rimsky-Korsakov *Sheherazade*, Op 35^b

SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden & Freiburg /

^aKirill Karabits, ^bAlejo Pérez

Hänssler Classic (F) CD93 289 (67' • DDD)



Two Russian ballets from two conductors in Freiburg

Different worlds entirely. Kirill Karabits's *Sythian Suite*, although occasionally hampered by rather edgeless sound (ie the internal brass in 'The Enemy God and the Dance of the Spirits of Darkness'), is all ritual posing and charismatic characterisation. I've rarely heard a more sinister account of 'The Night' or a more doggedly purposeful opening 'Adoration'. OK, in the second movement Dorati and the LSO (Mercury) lash out with a sharper blade, as does Claudio Abbado in Chicago (DG), but Karabits does well by the music's evocation of Eastern paganism. It's certainly a performance to return to.

By contrast – and here I'm risking total honesty – Alejo Pérez's *Sheherazade* sent me to sleep three times. But at least you know that I persevered, and not only did I listen all the way through but actually heard some of the performance more than once. I'm sure *Sheherazade*'s commissioning Sultan would have been delighted. It seems to me that Pérez is more interested in the story-teller than in the stories she's telling because the overriding impression here is of seductive lines, sensual textures and tonal opulence. There's hardly a hint of spray to 'The Sea and Sinbad's Ship' and much of the finale is just plain tepid. The middle movements work best, especially (and somewhat predictably) 'The Young Prince and Princess'. There are also some lovely solos and nicely turned phrases but the 'symphonic' element is woefully lacking. For that you need Reiner, Dorati, Kondrashin, Svetlanov or the highly combustible Golovanov (with David Oistrakh as a Marilyn Monroe among

Sheherazades) – if you can stand the constricted mono sound.

Rob Cowan

Prokofiev

Violin Concerto No 2, Op 63^a. Sonata for Two Violins, Op 56^b. Violin Sonata No 1, Op 80^c

Janine Jansen, ^bBoris Brovtsyn *vns* ^cItamar Golan *pf*

^aLondon Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
Decca (F) 478 3546DH (73' • DDD)



Jansen headlines orchestral and chamber Prokofiev

This splendidly recorded performance of the Second Concerto accentuates its stark and sudden contrasts – the first movement's swings of mood and texture, the *Andante*'s pairing of romantic melody with mechanical accompaniment. It's very different from the work's premiere recording, by Heifetz with the Boston SO and Koussevitzky. Taking the main theme and second subject at a flowing pace, Heifetz manages to unify the first *Allegro*'s disparate elements and in the *Andante* his faster tempo brings its expressive character to the fore, with the accompanying arpeggios less prominent than on the new recording. Jansen's playing, notable for its confident manner and wide expressive nuance – and in the finale matching Heifetz for incisiveness – persuades us of the validity of her view of the concerto.

In the Sonata for two violins, Jansen and Brovtsyn employ a wide range of tone colour, matching each other in expansiveness and virtuosity. In the quicker movements they allow the tempo to slow down for quieter passages; the violinists of the Pavel Haas Quartet keep more closely to the basic speed, making the music appear more cogent and unified, whereas Brovtsyn and Jansen reveal more fully its expressive range.

For me, the highlight of the disc is the Violin Sonata, surely one of Prokofiev's greatest works. Its sombre power is fully revealed in Jansen and Golan's account, from the first movement's anguished double-stopping, brittle *pizzicato* and icy scale passages, through the ferocious combat and sweet regret of the two middle movements, to the finale's manic energy and intensity. **Duncan Druce**

Vn Conc No 2 – selected comparison:

Heifetz, *Boston SO*, Koussevitzky
(10/38*, 1/91) (BIDD) LAB018

Sonata for Two Vns – selected comparison:

Pavel Haas *Qt* (3/10) (SUPR) SU3957-2

Ries

'Piano Concertos, Vol 5'

Piano Concertos – Op 42; Op 177.

Introduction et Rondeau brillant, Op 144

Christopher Hinterhuber *pf*

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra / Uwe Grodd
Naxos (S) 8 572742 (78' • DDD)

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

PERIOD-INSTRUMENT SCHUBERT

Gramophone's contributing editor **Rob Cowan** compares two newly issued Schubert symphony cycles from historically aware orchestras



'Breadth and weight': Mark Minkowski in Schubert's 'Unfinished'

Although Beethoven symphonies have to date enjoyed a fair amount of attention on disc from the period-instrument brigade, Schubert has for the most part remained the province of modern-instrument orchestras (Frans Brüggen's characterful set excepted). So it will be interesting to see if these two releases mark a new trend. At a glance and given Zig-Zag's copyright line of 2012 you'd expect that the two cycles are roughly contemporaneous, but they're not. Jos van Immerseel's *Anima Eterna* performances date from 1996-97, while Mark Minkowski's set with *Les Musiciens du Louvre* (played at a marginally lower pitch) were recorded live at the Vienna Konzerthaus as recently as March 2012. Both stand to reveal details about the music that you may never have noticed before but in terms of interpretative style, they're chalk and cheese. Recording-wise, too, they're very different, *Naïve* offering the closer, clearer sound frame, Zig-Zag a milder, at times more diffuse alternative.

Starting at the beginning, Immerseel opts for a double-quick *Adagio* introduction to the First Symphony, making for a seamless transition into a swift *Molto vivace*, where the violins are pure gossamer. Minkowski's introduction treads more slowly, his Minuet carries greater weight and right from the start of the finale the clarity facilitated by having spatially separated violin desks registers as

'Both stand to reveal details you may not have noticed but in terms of interpretative style, they're chalk and cheese'

a bonus. Immerseel scores added brownie points in the Second by observing the big first-movement repeat (as David Zinman does on his impressive recent Zurich Tonhalle recording for RCA), which Minkowski doesn't. On the other hand, at the start of the Minuet, Immerseel's band sounds furry, with indistinct violins, quite unlike *Les Musiciens*, where the violin image is pin-sharp.

In the Third Symphony, Minkowski points the *Allegretto* second movement with a winning smile, keeping to a moderate tempo so that the charming clarinet-led Trio breathes easily. Immerseel's pacing is similar but the smile is missing, the Trio rather more formal. For the opening chord of the Fourth Symphony Immerseel's timpani drown out the rest of the orchestra. Minkowski achieves a better balance and opts for a much slower tempo both in the *Adagio* introduction and in the main *Allegro vivace*, where Immerseel's faster pace sometimes compromises key detail.

By the time I reached the Fifth Symphony, I was beginning to sense a distinct pattern to these stylistic contrasts, with Immerseel more concerned with

texture than specific characterisation and Minkowski favouring an approach that it is above all musical. A useful litmus test is provided by the *Unfinished*, the beginning of the first movement's development section (immediately beyond the exposition repeat, which both conductors observe), where Minkowski subtly slows the line as storm clouds gather whereas Immerseel, although cueing some very quiet violins, keeps going without any alteration to the basic tempo. Is Minkowski's gesture *de rigueur*? No, but the passage sounds more impressive in his hands. In the second movement, Immerseel achieves mobility and lightness, Minkowski greater breadth and weight.

When it comes to the C major symphonies, the two Sixths are in many key respects fairly similar, aside from Minkowski's greater charm in the *Andante*, but in the 'Great' C major the stylistic divide is immense. As in the First Symphony, Immerseel launches the *Andante* introduction like a rocket whereas Minkowski holds back so that the transition to *Allegro ma non troppo* really takes off. Also, note the 'lift' that Minkowski brings to the *Allegro*'s second subject, like birdsong in early spring (memories of Kubelík with the RPO). Minkowski is also more effective in the two major 'crisis' points, at the centre of the second and fourth movements, and his *Scherzo*, although similarly paced to Immerseel's, has a more rustic feel to it. Then again, Immerseel inserts a couple of brassy interjections (four bars' worth) at 2'17", as per the autograph manuscript, an idea that Abbado pioneered on his recording with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Minkowski's is the more urgent approach but, although Immerseel is less inclined to highlight colour and drama, it would be unfair to deny the success of his impressively conscientious venture. Keeping it to cycles, Minkowski takes his place alongside the vivacious Brüggen, Abbado and Zinman with the Tonhalle (a balance of period manners and 'modern' sonorities), as well as with Hans Zender (insightful and much underrated, on Hänssler), Karajan (a weightier alternative) and the more 'central' readings of Kertész, Mehta and Böhm. But as a first call, in excellent sound, Minkowski is a pretty compelling – and exciting – bet. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Schubert Symphonies Nos 1-9
Les Musiciens du Louvre / Minkowski
Naïve Ⓢ ④ V5299



Schubert Symphonies Nos 1-9
Anima Eterna / Immerseel
Zig-Zag Territoires Ⓢ ④ ZZT308



Fifth volume of concertos by Beethoven's pupil Ries

Violins not spread out but bunched on the left, cellos and basses similarly on the right. The piano is dead centre but its tone is shallow; and the hazy reproduction of the orchestra, violins a bit grainy too, softens the band's expertly played contribution. The presentation isn't helpful to a composer who for long has been only a name in books and whose music was, nearly a century ago, considered to be 'of skilful industry rather than originality'.

There is some truth in this. Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838), Beethoven's pupil who also publicised the master's cause, was a 'deft pianist' (David Dubal) and, in these concertos he wrote for himself, tended to spin out his dexterity mostly in lengthy finales of slender musical content. The traces of glibness that surface periodically cannot thus be ascribed to Christopher Hinterhuber, who carries the notes with pinpoint accuracy. Yet Ries's skills as an expert orchestrator also surface regularly, especially in the two slow movements that are of a touching largesse, reflecting another side of his personality. And not lost on Hinterhuber or Uwe Grodd, who home in on the strengths and emphasise them, not least in the finest work here, the eighth and last piano concerto, Op 177. It's on a bigger scale, particularly in the orchestral ritornello of the first movement that Grodd offers as an imposing exposition, taken up by Hinterhuber who is equally aware of its quality. 'Skilful industry' wasn't Ries's only attribute. **Nalen Anthoni**

Rózsa

'Orchestral Works, Vol 3'

Violin Concerto, Op 24^a.

Concerto for String Orchestra, Op 17.

Theme, Variations and Finale, Op 13

^a**Jennifer Pike** *vn*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Rumon Gamba

Chandos © CHAN10738 (75' • DDD)



Pike plays Rózsa in Heifetz's footsteps

Though Miklós Rózsa had a cosmopolitan career, studying in Leipzig and living in Paris and London before becoming one of the most famous Hollywood movie composers, he never left behind the modal inflections and melodic character of the music of his native Hungary. The pre-war Variations are based on what sounds like a genuine folk melody, announced by a solo oboe. The work is a brilliantly scored orchestral showpiece, forceful, energetic variations alternating with episodes of lyrical expansion. The Concerto for string orchestra of 1943 is an altogether darker, more intense piece – even the folk-style finale has sinister

episodes and the stark, declamatory themes of the first movement give it the character of a desperate lament. Whatever Rózsa's intentions may have been, the music appears like a commemoration of an Eastern European culture in the process of destruction.

The Violin Concerto written for Heifetz has a traditional form and a fine balance of lyrical and virtuoso elements. On this spacious new recording I was particularly impressed by the wide landscapes of the slow movement and the dream-like episode in the middle of the finale. Comparing Jennifer Pike's performance with the original Heifetz recording, hers appears cooler and more contemplative. Though she plays the brilliant passages extremely well, she lacks something of Heifetz's manic energy and his ability to make of each movement a single passionate utterance. There's much to be said for this calmer performance, highlighting the beauty of Rózsa's intricate interplay between violin and orchestra. **Duncan Druce**

Vn Conc – selected comparison:

Heifetz, Dallas SO, Hendl (4/89) (RCA) GD87963

Salonen

Violin Concerto^a. **Nyx**

^a**Lella Josefowicz** *vn* **Finnish Radio Symphony**

Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

DG © 479 0628GH (48' • DDD)



Composer-conductor Salonen with his concerto's dedicatee

If your ideal of musical Finnishness has to match the austerity and intensity of *Tapiola*, Sibelius's final tone-poem, then the compositions of Esa-Pekka Salonen, like those of his friends and contemporaries Kaija Saariaho and Magnus Lindberg, might seem regrettably over-elaborate – and this pair of recent scores will do little to change your mind.

The first of the Violin Concerto's four movements, called 'Mirage', conveys the kind of generalised agitation and false sense of security that fit the title well. The two short central movements, each called 'Pulse', add to the music's balletic aura. But the longest movement, the final 'Adieu', not only deepens the expressive profile but also works with more clearly defined thematic materials, and the last three of its 12 minutes project a rather beautiful song of farewell, the soloist reaching for the stars against a tolling accompaniment as the music fades into nothingness. The effectiveness of this restraint underlines the relative bombast of the movement's contrasting materials, and there is a comparable separation between assertively brash densities and more rarefied sonorities in the orchestral work *Nyx*.

Nyx is a Greek goddess associated with night and Salonen's music is at its best when searching for a nocturnal atmosphere that is not simply drifting nebulously but moving

forwards with a dream-like sense of menace and mystery. Episodes that come across as evocations of full-blown horrors are less appealing but these performances, played with great polish and panache and recorded with a winning blend of clarity and spaciousness, provide the best possible advocacy.

Arnold Whittall

R Strauss

Eine Alpensinfonie, Op 64. **Symphonic Fantasy from Die Frau ohne Schatten**

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Frank Shipway
BIS © BIS-CD1950 (77' • DDD)



Brit Shipway takes players from São Paulo to the Alps

A dramatic case of fire and ice if ever there was one. The São Paulo SO, sagely conducted by Frank Shipway, bring their South American heat to Strauss's Alpine expedition. Icy peaks melt away just a little in the face of their panache. You might argue that nobility has to some extent been sacrificed to the brazenness of the playing but you cannot deny the fervour of what they bring. I don't know of a more exciting account on disc. BIS's engineers lay it all out in cinematic splendour.

First comes dawn and a sunburst of burnished horns. The offstage posse could have been a little more distanced for optimum effect but horn lovers will not be disappointed. There are plenty of thrills to come. The scenic 'special effects' are suitably ear-popping and each of the 'points sublime' do not spare the decibels. The summit again brings over-reaching horns, a couple of trumpet bullseyes and huge sighing *glissandos* in the violins. The storm is torrential, the mighty quadruple *forte* pretty sensational, though you could argue that the orchestra has already 'peaked' once too often. No question, though, that the final 'Ausklang' – the philosophical 'summation' of the piece – is beautifully done, with Shipway coaxing a convincingly Straussian glow from his players.

Strauss's own 'Symphonic Fantasy' on his opera of questionable taste *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is far less of an indigestible potpourri than that of his friend Ernst Roth (or indeed the incoherent concoction that Vladimir Jurowski recently laid out in London) and the trick would seem to be that he focuses almost entirely on the music associated with Barak, the dyer, and his wife. He is nobly voiced by the São Paulo's first trombone at the heart of the piece and the final paragraph is that of the opera – from the climactic quartet and spiritual 'purification' of the two couples.

I'm never entirely sure what I feel about *Eine Alpensinfonie* but if the thrill factor is what you seek above all from it, then I don't think you'll be disappointed by Shipway and his intrepid Paulistanos. **Edward Seckerson**

Tchaikovsky

The Sleeping Beauty, Op 66

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Neeme Järvi
Chandos ② ③ CHSA5113 (155' • DDD/DSD • S)



Ehnes takes the solos in Järvi's Bergen Beauty

This is a good, practical interpretation of *The Sleeping Beauty*. The playing by the Bergen Philharmonic is strong and spirited; Järvi's conducting is rational, adopting as it does the natural paces and colouristic inflections from which it is possible to appreciate the character of the dances in one's mind's eye, all the more so with the excellent synopsis included in the booklet. And there are bonuses in the fact that James Ehnes is the scintillating violin soloist in Aurora's variations in Acts 1 and 3, and in the Act 2 *Entr'acte*, with the American cellist Robert deMaine playing with discreet passion the solo part in the *Pas d'action* of Act 2, the theme poignantly related to the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony that Tchaikovsky had completed shortly before embarking on *The Sleeping Beauty*.

While such numbers as the 'Rose Adagio', the 'Garland Waltz' and the Act 2 'Panorama' inevitably stand out as inspired landmarks in this long score, the motivic cross-references lend it a certain amount of structural cohesion and in general Järvi does a sound job in sustaining the dramatic flow, coming into his own with climactic drive in such set pieces as Aurora's awakening during the Act 2 *Entr'acte symphonique*. The first CD ends about 10 minutes into Act 2, with the rest of the ballet on the second disc. But a split has to be made somewhere and this one does not unduly mar a performance that captures so much of the music's charm, vigour and breadth.

Geoffrey Norris

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74.

Romeo and Juliet

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard
BIS ② ③ BIS-SACD1959 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Dausgaard's 'opening doors' project alights on Tchaikovsky

Following their intensely refreshing, at times revelatory forays into Schubert, Schumann and Bruckner, Thomas Dausgaard and his exemplary Swedish CO now turn their sights to Tchaikovsky. The virtues are self-evident: Dausgaard elicits some impressively accomplished and consistently bright-eyed playing, textures are sifted with watchful care (the orchestral layout – with antiphonal first and second violin desks, and double basses rear left – is an enormous boon), and his readings are abundantly musical, eminently cogent,

free of eccentricity and eschew any spurious expressive posturing (vibrato is most discreetly deployed), their innate good taste and sense of classical equilibrium never allowing the listener to forget for one moment Tchaikovsky's veneration of Mozart.

If I'm not blown away, it's simply that Andris Nelsons and the CBSO achieved much the same goals on their identically coupled Orfeo release, which also benefits from the irresistible frisson associated with a live event as well as a more gratifyingly rich (yet never cloying) body of string tone than Dausgaard's group can inevitably muster. The Dane does, however, steer clear of the interpretative quirks that take just a little of the shine off Nelsons's *Romeo and Juliet*, whereas in the *Pathétique* it's the Latvian who generates the greater electricity, communicative urgency and emotional heat (without any loss in sure-footed composure or fastidious attention to detail). BIS's engineering is wonderfully transparent, excitingly wide-ranging and wholly truthful.

Andrew Achenbach

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

CBSO, Nelsons (5/11) (ORFE) C832 101A

Vaughan Williams

'Early and Late Works –

World Premiere Recordings'

Folk Songs of the Four Seasons – Suite.

Bucolic Suite. Dark Pastoral^o. Serenade (1898)

♫ Guy Johnston vc

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch ④ CDLX7289 (71' • DDD)



RVW completions and premieres from Glasgow

Given the conspicuous success of John Wilson's world premiere recording of the imposing *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* (6/10), it was only natural that the folks at Dutton should turn their attention to further offerings from Vaughan Williams's formative years. Dating from 1898, the *Serenade* in A minor was the composer's very first orchestral work and initially cast in four movements, the third of which ('Intermezzo and Trio') was subsequently replaced by a 'Romance' of haunting poetry and no little emotional scope, its slumbering passion surfacing with a vengeance in a positively Puccinian climax (listen out for some unexpectedly *verismo* string-writing at 7'18"). Julian Rushton's new edition deftly accommodates all five surviving movements and reveals a work of personable warmth, uncommon assurance and fresh-faced charm, a description that extends to the *Bucolic Suite* of 1900-01, where RVW's scoring undoubtedly acquires an extra guile and luminosity (those cannily blended brass sonorities from 1'40" in the finale are especially striking). First

heard at the 2010 Proms, *Dark Pastoral* comprises David Matthews's treasurably idiomatic completion of RVW's sketches for the slow movement of a projected Cello Concerto (the recipient was to have been the great Pablo Casals). The Fifth Symphony dates from the same period (1942-43) so it's not surprising there are echoes of that masterpiece (and its sublime 'Romanza' in particular). Guy Johnston makes an impeccable soloist. That merely leaves the colourful and breezy five-movement suite for orchestra that Roy Douglas compiled from *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*, a large-scale choral work originally fashioned in 1949 for the National Federation of Women's Institutes. Yates presides over enthusiastic, spick-and-span performances. The sound is vivid, if a touch raw, and Lewis Foreman's notes are engaging.

Andrew Achenbach

Villa-Lobos

Symphonies – No 6, 'On the Outline of the Mountains of Brazil'; No 7

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra /

Isaac Karabtchevsky

Naxos ⑤ 8 573043 (68' • DDD)

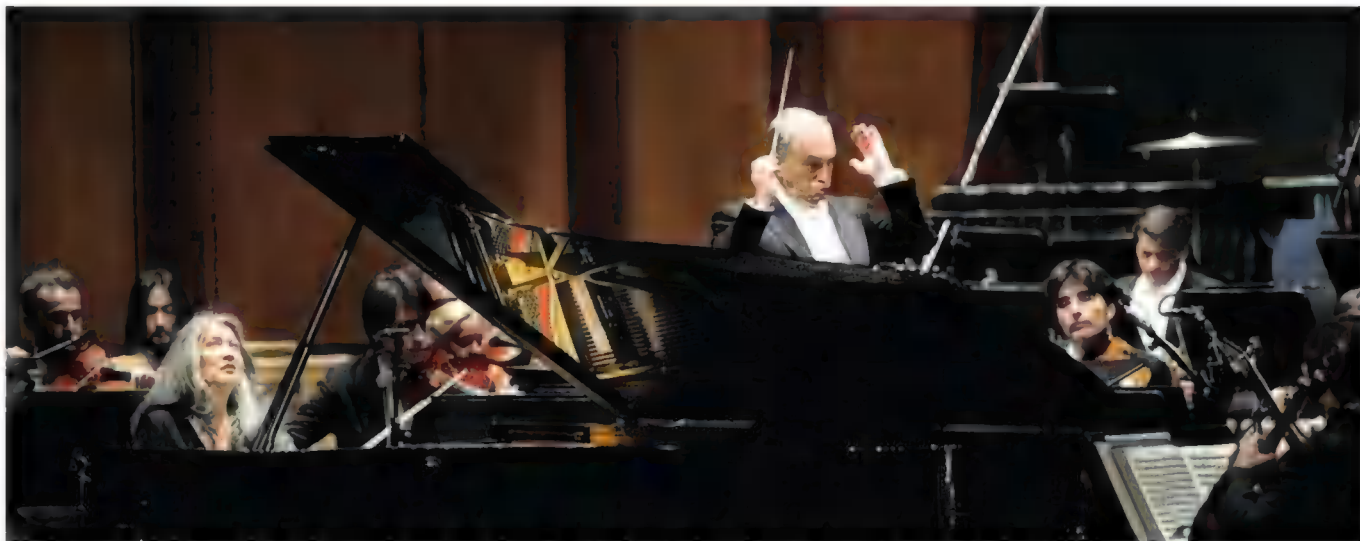


First disc in Naxos's new São Paulo Villa-Lobos cycle

Just what the world needs, another cycle of Villa-Lobos symphonies? Well, one thing becomes clear from the get-go – Carl St Clair and the Stuttgart SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra, who cut a late-1990s/early-2000s Villa-Lobos symphony cycle for CPO, are outshone by the São Paulo SO and Isaac Karabtchevsky. That much, perhaps, you would expect. Karabtchevsky and the orchestra are on home terrain. But compare the opening moments of this new Sixth Symphony with the Stuttgart version and we're palpably dealing with something grander than nuances of interpretation: Karabtchevsky makes Villa-Lobos's zig-zagging, lopsided melodic line sound as boldly and brashly sculpted as Mount Rushmore, which, given that Villa-Lobos generated his melodic line by putting tracing paper over an image of the mountains around Rio de Janeiro, is exactly right.

Karabtchevsky's steadier, more deliberate tempo helps. But what merely sounds ungainly and idiomatically clumsy in St Clair's hands becomes musically engaged here. The *Lento* movement also benefits from his cutting Villa-Lobos some expressive slack. To continue the mountain-based metaphors, Karabtchevsky's performance has a sense of ascent: you can hear the different strata, feel air blowing through the structure – neither of which St Clair's 'are we there yet?' conducting provides.

True enough, neither man solves the problem of the finale, which feels like



Live in Lugano: Martha Argerich, Gabriel Chmura and the Svizzera Italiana Orchestra negotiate Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto in June 2009

Villa-Lobos is desperately trying to contrive a valedictory leave-taking statement that his material isn't up to. But this does bode well for Naxos's projected complete Villa-Lobos symphony cycle, even if we are going to have to take the rough with the smooth. The Seventh Symphony, written in 1945, a year after the Sixth, is an utter mess: over-orchestrated to the point where the energy he is trying to unleash topples over into its own over-indulged flab, this is a reminder that few composers as brilliant as Villa-Lobos could screw up as badly.

Philip Clark

Syms – selected comparison:

SWR SO, Stuttgart, *St Clair* (CPO) CPO777 516-2

Weber

Symphonies – No 1, Op 19 J50; No 2, J51.

Aufforderung zum Tanze, Op 65 J260

(orch Berlioz). Bassoon Concerto, Op 75 J127^a

^aKaren Geoghegan *bn*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena

Chandos © CHAN10748 (69' • DDD)



Mena and the BBC Phil join the Weber revival

Weber's only symphonies were knocked off at great speed – with quasi-Mozartian fluency of melody, orchestration and pulse (and a little Mozartian borrowing at the start of Op 19) – for an Eszterháza-like oboe-playing patron in just over a month at the turn of the year 1806. Their use of dance- and opera-like fragments within each movement can make each symphony feel (delightfully) like a suite of overtures. Academics may sniff at such an apparent lack of structure but the works' musical argument and pace should be the delight of anyone who enjoys these 'Classical' scores poised on the cusp of full-blown Romanticism – like Schubert's Symphony No 3 with its distinctive oboe lead-in to the first

Allegro. Neither of Weber's symphonies is long or calls for unusual or commercially unviable resources. Yet neither has really yet entered the concert hall or recorded repertoire, probably because the music has had no prominent champion since Erich Kleiber (Decca and others have a Cologne radio recording of Op 19). But, in the current wave of what appears to be a mini-Weber revival, the present performances – superbly prepared, played and recorded – could help to change that.

Mena immediately sounds like a natural Weberian who, together with his smart horns and timpanist, has absorbed enough of historic-instrument practice to spare the music the false-sounding weighty Viennese classicism that used to be inflicted on many early-19th-century scores. A similar authentic spring informs the Berlioz *Invitation* transcription while Geoghegan repeats with aplomb her familiar traversal of the Concerto. A winner.

Mike Ashman

'Lugano Concertos'

Bartók Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119^a **Beethoven**

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15^b; No 2, Op 19^c **Brahms**

Liebesslieder, Op 52^d **Liszt** Piano Concerto No 1,

S124^e **Mozart** Concerto for Three Pianos, K242^f.

Andante and Variations, K501^g **Poulenc** Concerto

for Two Pianos^h **Prokofiev** Piano Concertos –

No 1, Op 10^b; No 3, Op 26ⁱ **Schubert** *Divertissement*

à la hongroise, D818^j **Schumann** Piano Concerto,

Op 54^k

Martha Argerich *pf* with ^lPaul Gulda, ^mRico Gulda,

ⁿAlexander Gurning, ^oAlexander Mogilevsky,

^pGabriela Montero, ^qAkane Sakai *pf* ^rChorus of

Radlotelevisione Svizzera / ^sDiego Fasolis;

^tSvizzera Italiana Orchestra / ^uErasmus Capilla,

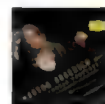
^vGabriel Chmura, ^wCharles Dutoit, ^xIon Marin,

^yAlexandre Rabinovitch-Barakovsky,

^zAlexander Vedernikov

DG © 477 9884GM4 (5h 11' • DDD)

Recorded Ilve 2004-10



Unreleased concertos from Argerich at her Swiss festival

The four CDs come in a slip-case the size and thickness of the average paperback measuring about 8"x5" in old money. Inside is a hardback book with two discs affixed into trays at either end. Printed on high-quality paper are the track listings, after which there is a brief essay in English, French, German and Italian on the birth and aims of the Progetto Martha Argerich at the Lugano Festival, the provenance for all these performances. Nowhere is there a word about the composers, music or artists. So far, so odd. But if ever there was (slip) case of not judging a book by its cover, this is it. This 'limited edition de luxe set' features nine concertos, four of which (Mozart K242, Prokofiev's First, Bartók's Third and Poulenc for two pianos) are new to Argerich's Deutsche Grammophon discography, as well as her first-ever recordings of Schubert's *Divertissement*, Brahms's *Liebesslieder* and Milhaud's *Scaramouche*. Recorded at Lugano Festivals between 2004 and 2010, none of the material has hitherto been released.

Argerich devotees will snap this set up without encouragement; others who invest in only benchmark recordings of great works will already have her playing Beethoven's First and Second, Schumann, Prokofiev's Third and Liszt's First – some of her signature concertos – all of which are included here. I would not deter anyone from 'duplicating' because, without going through a movement-by-movement comparison, there are many moments and passages of pure delight, often deriving from the frisson of a live performance (listen to the Poulenc!). One marvels anew at such freshly minted interpretations married to the insights, subtle nuances and detail acquired only after long acquaintance.

In Mozart's Concerto for Three Pianos, co-ordination between Argerich and Paul and Rico Gulda is not always spot on but the spirit behind the performance is. I wonder whose decision it was to interpolate the theme from the *Andante* of K467 into the finale?

But it is disc 4, with the three 'new works', to which Argerich's fans will turn first. The *Divertissement à la hongroise* is only the fourth work by Schubert that she has issued on disc (no solo works at all – a strange omission). Here she is partnered by Alexander Mogilevsky in an utterly captivating account from the 2006 festival. The previous year Argerich (*secondo*) teamed up with her friend Gabriela Montero (*primo*) for Brahms's 18 *Liebeslieder* for choir and piano four hands. In an airy acoustic, the Swiss Radio Choir sing with ardent intensity and with marvellous precision, notably well balanced with the pianists – a feat not always engineered in many studio recordings.

The one disappointment is *Scaramouche* with the Austrian Karin Merle, an Argerich intimate since student days. Tempi in all three movements are puzzlingly slow – *Modéré* limps in at 4'48" while *Brazileira*, admittedly a samba, sounds terribly tired compared with the vivacious 1938 recording by the composer and Marcelle Meyer. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'British Clarinet Concertos'

Arnold Clarinet Concerto No 2, Op 115 **Finzi** Clarinet Concerto, Op 31 **Stanford** Clarinet Concerto, Op 80
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Michael Collins c/
Chandos © CHAN10739 (66' • DDD)



Concertos from Collins, directing from his clarinet

Arguably one of the best-conceived Romantic clarinet concertos, Stanford's Clarinet Concerto of 1902 has now had a fair number of outings on CD, with Thea King (Hyperion, 11/80), Emma Johnson (ASV, 6/92), Robert Plane (Naxos, 12/08), John Finucane (RTÉ Lyric FM) and Janet Hilton (Chandos, 1/92); indeed, this is the second recording made by Chandos but is executed in a unique manner, with soloist Michael Collins acting as conductor of the BBC SO. Collins's playing is compelling throughout, as is his conception of the larger one-movement span. The orchestral playing of the BBC SO is crisp and the clarity of the recording allows one to hear a lot more the harmonic colour and variety that is lost in some of the others. There is much energy in the last movement, where Collins shows off not only his splendid agility but also the affecting pathos of the closing pages of the score.

Similarly, Finzi's Concerto has been a favourite of many clarinetists over the years with its appealing, euphonious melodies enhanced by the rich accompaniment for strings. Collins's nuances, carefully shaped

phrasing and *rubato* are beautifully suited to the melancholy yearning of Finzi's style, particularly in the plangent slow movement. Arnold's Second Clarinet Concerto, by contrast, has a sharper edge that lies tantalisingly between neo-classicism and neo-romanticism. All three movements are highly characterful in their exploration of dance, ragtime and song, though the wistful slow movement is most evocative. **Jeremy Dibble**

'Solti - Journey of a Lifetime'

A film by **Georg Wübbolt**

C Major Entertainment © 711708; © 711804
(52' • 54' • NTSC • 16:9 [4:3 bonus] • 1080i •
PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonus: Sir Georg Solti conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Shostakovich's First Symphony, Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony and the Prelude to Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*



Wübbolt's anniversary film with symphonies from Chicago

Georg Wübbolt's film celebrates the 100th anniversary of Solti's birth on October 21, 1912. After the selection of pithy encomiums from talking heads that customarily inaugurates such ventures, the film settles into a deft, whistle-stop chronological survey of the great conductor's life and career. It was a tough journey to the top, as Sir Peter Jonas eloquently adumbrates at one point, with the young Solti losing his parents, his name (György Stern) and his country. 'I fought it out and never stopped thinking about conducting,' says the octogenarian Solti. 'I had to fight for my life.'

Solti is a documentary director's dream. Unlike, say, Sir Adrian Boult or Bernard Haitink, there is always so much to look at even when he's sitting still. His extraordinary range of physical and facial gestures puts him almost, but not quite, in the terpsichorean class of Leonard Bernstein. György, Georg or Sir George was not a 'less is more' man when it came to podium technique. But the results speak for themselves. The mesmeric maestro won 32 Grammy Awards, more than any other artist, pop or classical. His recording of *The Ring*, so Norman Lebrecht tells us, is the best-selling classical record of all time.

Narration and commentary is voiced principally by the contributors (they include Valerie Solti, Valery Gergiev, Christoph von Dohnányi and, of course, Sir Georg himself), but occasionally and intrusively by an American-accented voice-over, delivered in the same apocalyptic tones that you hear in cinema trailers. There is much skilfully sequenced archive footage (though none of Solti's tenure at Covent Garden), even if the director finds it hard ever to linger on his subject doing what he did best. For this, turn to 'Solti in Rehearsal'

filmed in the late Sixties (Arthaus, 3/04) or the 54-minute bonus on the present disc of him conducting a concert of Russian music with his beloved Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1977.

Worth a view, but the best documentary on Solti remains Peter Maniura's longer portrait, *The Making of a Maestro* (Arthaus, 2/02), first shown just a few weeks before Solti's death – and that has some scenes with Solti that will move you to tears. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Tango Rhapsody'

Jusid *Tango Rhapsody* **Jusid/Kauderer** The Secret in their Eyes **Piazzolla** Michelangelo '70 (arr Jusid).

Adiós Noniño (arr Ziegler). *La muerte del Ángel*.

Revirado **Ziegler** *Asfalto*. *El Empedrado*.

Milongueta. *Sandunga*

Karin Lechner, Sergio Tiempo pfs

Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Jacek Kaspszyk

Avanti © AVANTI10332 (64' • DDD)

Includes bonus DVD



Choice pianist Tiempo swaps Chopin for Piazzolla

Piazzolla's music, and *tango nuevo* itself, is a bit like marmite. I will confess to being a lover – in small doses. Brother-and-sister duo Karin Lechner and Sergio Tiempo's programme is dazzlingly executed, as one would expect: Lechner is an accompanist for Barbara Hendricks and Viktoria Mullova among others, while Tiempo's earlier solo and chamber recordings have been well received in these pages (A/02, 7/06). Nalen Anthoni described them as 'excellently endowed both technically and artistically' (6/08). That shows in their evolving expressive elaborations of these pieces, playing directly on the strings, clapping the music stands, stamping and so on.

Piazzolla's are the most individual items on the disc, with *Adiós Noniño* and *La muerte del Ángel* two of his most recorded. *Michelangelo '70* is a typical – perhaps too typical – example of his tango style, although *Revirado* presents a different side to him. I last encountered Pablo Ziegler's music on Erwin Schrott's fun Latin disc 'Rojotango' (A/11). Duo Lechner-Tiempo took lessons from him, reigniting their passion for tango; his four pieces are less distinctive than Piazzolla's but neatly put together. Federico Jusid's *Tango Rhapsody* is a playful concerto best appreciated on the bonus DVD where its theatricality (with pianists' stealings-on and stormings-off, a huge row in the central section with borderline maltreatment of the instruments and a gushing, Rachmaninovian reconciliation) can be seen. Without the visual element it struck me as a vibrant, dynamically scored work with a Latin flavour, toying at times with jazz, Hollywood film scores and with a rhythmic interplay owing as much to Bartók and Stravinsky as to tango. Undeniably fun. **Guy Rickards**

GRAMOPHONE *Reissues*

THE DELIUS COLLECTION

Delius expert **Jeremy Dibble** welcomes the long-awaited reappearance of Eric Fenby's recordings of his master's music



'Heroic work': Eric Fenby, Delius's amanuensis

There can be no doubt that *Delius As I Knew Him*, Eric Fenby's literary recollections of his time with Delius between 1928 and 1934, had a major role in forming our impressions of one of Britain's most extraordinary, cosmopolitan composers. This reissue of seven CDs remains a tribute to Fenby for the heroic work he carried out with a man whose *Weltanschauung* was often deeply antipathetical to his own. Although Fenby was never a professional conductor, he developed a significant reputation as a conductor of Delius's music. And after a BBC Radio 3 programme in 1978, when he introduced and conducted some of the works he had taken down by dictation from the composer, the idea came to John Goldsmith of Unicorn Records to record all the orchestral works from that late period on a two-LP set in 1981. Further recordings followed, which also included songs with piano and orchestral accompaniment, and works from an earlier period of Delius's life, to which were added a number of recordings by Norman Del Mar and Vernon Handley. These recordings were reissued on CD in 1995 by Unicorn-Kanchana and are now available together in this box-set on the Heritage label.

One of the most interesting facets of this collection is to hear the chamber music and songs with Fenby on Delius's *Ibach* three-quarter grand bequeathed to him by the

'It is interesting to hear Fenby playing on Delius's Ibach three-quarter grand piano bequeathed to him by the composer'

composer, its slightly fragile but by no means ineffective tone providing us with a glimpse of earlier days in Delius's music room at Grez-sur-Loing. The Cello Sonata, always a difficult work to interpret and one fraught with the dangers of monotony, is brought to life beautifully by Julian Lloyd Webber's careful shades and graded phrases. Ralph Holmes's readings of the three violin sonatas are also highly sympathetic but they lack the vitality, vigour and poetry of Tasmin Little and Piers Lane, whose recording for Conifer has an exquisite array of diffused colours, especially in the Second, the most successful of the three. It is also a treat to hear Sarah Walker, Felicity Lott and the late Anthony Rolfe Johnson in the songs with Fenby at the piano, but even more so with orchestra.

Delius was a supreme master of this idiom, as such splendid miniature essays as 'Wine Roses' and 'Il pleure dans mon cœur' demonstrate, and Rolfe Johnson's ecstatic performance of 'A Late Lark', the last piece Delius was able to complete before the onset of his paralysis and blindness, shows that that composer's creative powers were far from

spent. Fenby's recordings of the orchestral and choral music are, by contrast, a rather mixed bag. In the elegiac works, such as the Prelude to *Irmelin*, the Intermezzo to *Fennimore and Gerda*, the Caprice and Elegy (again with Lloyd Webber) and the *Two Aquarelles*, Fenby finds that perfect chemistry of *rubato* and tranquillity. The orchestral sound of *A Song of Summer* is sumptuous and, for the most part, Fenby's reading of the lyrical dimension in the outer sections is compelling, though the developmental central paragraph again lacks that freer liquidity that others such as Handley have shown; and I would extend this criticism to the livelier works such as the *Dance Rhapsody* No 2 and the *Fantastic Dance*, where the tempi require a greater elasticity. The performances of the choral works have a broadness and stature about them, especially in the *Songs of Farewell*, which Fenby must have known so intimately, and *Cynara* (surely the finest gem that Fenby helped give birth to) is spaciouly sung by Tom Allen (though I own to a preference for Shirley-Quirk's performance with Groves and the RLPO on EMI). Allen is also fine in *An Arabesque* (where he is more forward in the recording) but the tempo feels rather leaden at times in the moments of emotional abandon. I feel this, too, in the *Songs of Sunset*, where the chorus appears distant, though there are some lovely, nostalgic reflections from Sarah Walker. Fenby, however, seems much more at home in *The Song of the High Hills* and the rapturous pages of the *Idyll*, where he acquires a more persuasive suppleness.

While Fenby's historic recordings are obviously a major attraction, the inclusion of rarities such as the *Légende* and the Suite for violin and orchestra (played by Holmes and conducted with panache by Handley), and the pre-Leipzig *Polka Zum Carnival* (written during his orange-growing in Florida in 1885) for piano (played by Eric Parkin) are fascinating for anyone interested in the early development of Delius's style. The recordings of *Paris, Life's Dance* and the problematic Piano Concerto (in a robust performance by Philip Fowke) remind us what a fine Delius interpreter Del Mar was. Hence, for any Delius *Liebbaber* looking for 'total immersion' or a novice looking for an introduction to this most enthralling of composers, this collection, for all its unevenness, will not fail to provide hours of edifying listening. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Delius Collection
Various artists
Heritage © HTGCD700

Chamber



Harriet Smith reviews Fauré from the London Bridge Ensemble:

'They're not as emotionally fraught as some, but always warm, letting Fauré's exquisite lines speak for themselves' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



Lindsay Kemp on the first recording from Fantasticus:

'They tread a canny line between characterising individual sections and maintaining wholeness' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**

JS Bach

Six Sonatas for Harpsichord and Violin, BWV1014-19

Catherine Manson *vn* **Ton Koopman** *hpd*

Challenge Classics ② CC72560 (99' • DDD)



Another Koopman and Manson collaboration

In these wonderful sonatas, the majority of movements are written as three-part counterpoint – the harpsichordist's two hands plus the violin line. Here, the instruments are recorded quite closely, so that the polyphonic substance is focused with especial clarity: combined with brisk speeds and energetic, finely poised rhythmic delivery, the quicker movements acquire a splendidly exhilarating quality. The downside of such a sound picture is that where the harpsichord accompanies the violin, it can seem too insistent. However, this only seriously affects one movement in the set, the opening *Adagio* of the Third Sonata.

Ton Koopman adds profuse ornamentation to his part. His sense of style is completely secure and he goes a long way towards giving his instrument an expressive character to match the violin. Even in the fast movements he shows that decoration can help onward impetus. Catherine Manson plays expressively; using very little vibrato, her tone is notably rich and, in *cantabile* movements such as those that open the Fourth and Fifth Sonatas, her sense of line leads to performances of true eloquence. My only criticism is that in the *Allegro* movements her long notes tend to be played with noticeable bulges, where either a gradual increase or a decline from the start of the note would make more sense.

The set makes an interesting comparison with the rather more sober performances by Lucy van Dael and Bob van Asperen (Naxos). Van Dael concentrates more than Manson on the rhetorical shape of each phrase; Manson, with smoother phrasing, makes us more aware of the shape of the music's paragraphs. Van Asperen's plainer, sturdier style has strength and vigour but can seem less involving than Koopman's brilliant, more imaginative presentation. And the more distant Naxos recording may produce a more rounded overall sound but lessens the impact of such

pieces as the joyful *Allegro* at the start of the Sixth Sonata. Overall, Koopman and Manson have a distinct edge. **Duncan Druce**

Selected comparison:

Van Dael, Van Asperen (4/01) (NAXO)

8 554614 and 8 554783 (ous)

Bartók

'Works for Violin and Piano, Vol 2'

Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117. Violin Sonata, Sz20.

Hungarian Dances (trans Országh/Bartók).

Hungarian Folk Tunes (trans Szigeti/Bartók).

Romanian Folk Dances (trans Székely)

James Ehnes *vn* **Andrew Armstrong** *pf*

Chandos ③ CHAN10752 (78' • DDD)



Second disc in Ehnes's violin-and-piano Bartók survey

Ehnes gives a stunning account of the Solo Sonata. The impression is that he's simply following all Bartók's meticulous direction – bowing, dynamics, modifications of tempo – and adding nothing extra. If this seems boring, the effect is anything but: clarity of articulation, beauty of sound, the ease with which he surmounts the technical challenges, and deep understanding of the work's structure and character; all these combine to make a performance that's exciting and enthralling. It's very different from the recent Vilde Frang recording, which is equally brilliant but more overtly passionate and full of individual touches that give it the aspect of a fascinating personal take on the music. Ehnes, presenting unadorned Bartók, as it were, ultimately leaves a stronger impression.

It's intriguing to search for hints of the mature Bartók in the 1903 Sonata, an ambitious, large-scale work whose first movement is elaborated in a somewhat Straussian manner, followed by a variation movement and finale that draw on a post-Lisztian Hungarian idiom. Played as here, with intense commitment and real virtuosity, it's a most enjoyable piece. The middle movement is particularly engaging – a sombre, funereal theme and variations that suggest different styles of gypsy music, with cimbalom-like flourishes. Andrew Armstrong catches the spirit of these to perfection. The three suites of

folk pieces are performed in authentic style and with irresistible panache. If anyone doubts Ehnes's status as a wizard of the violin, they should listen to the way he plays the harmonics on tr 19. **Duncan Druce**

Solo Vn Son – selected comparison:

Frang (5/11) (EMI) 947639-2

Beethoven

'The Complete String Quartets, Vol 1'

String Quartets – No 1, Op 18 No 1; No 2, Op 18 No 2; No 4, Op 18 No 4; No 6, Op 18 No 6; No 9, Op 59 No 3; No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95; No 12, Op 127; No 14, Op 131

Belcea Quartet

Zig-Zag Territoires ③ ZZT315 (3h 53' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Maltings, Snape, Suffolk, 2011



First half of the Belcea Quartet's Beethoven cycle

Rather than presenting their Beethoven set in a neat chronological series, the Belcea Quartet mix quartets of different periods on each CD, as the Alban Berg Quartet did some years ago. Also like the ABQ, these performances are described as being recorded 'in concert', but applause has been edited out and indeed there's nothing to suggest live performance.

I'm particularly impressed by the Belcea's close attention to dynamics. Beethoven, whose performance indications are more copious than his predecessors' and contemporaries', clearly related dynamics to form and phrasing, so the exactness of the placing of *crescendos*, the vivid distinction between *piano* and *pianissimo*, give the music an authentic life – illuminating the composer's imagination. Similarly, the Belcea's insistence that slurs denote a true *legato* helps enormously in conveying the music's emotional import. Their playing may have a very different sound from the string quartets of Beethoven's day but the way the music breathes and moves gives a clear picture of his intentions.

Nearly all the time the Belcea's polish is a delight. But in the *Presto* movement of Op 131, where Beethoven has a number of jokes at the players' expense, expecting them to dovetail rhythmic fragments at high speed, the effect is so smooth that the listener may be unaware of any humorous intent. More often, though, the Belcea are at their best in the *scherzo*-like



Paying close attention: the Belcea Quartet record Beethoven at the Britten Studio, Snape Maltings

movements – those in Op 18 Nos 1 and 6, Op 95 and Op 127 are outstanding, and other pieces of a light-hearted character are similarly alert, and dramatic or playful as appropriate.

Beethoven provided metronome marks for all his quartets up to Op 95. Some of his speeds are challengingly fast; for such pieces as the finale of Op 59 No 3 the Belceas, playing as quickly as they can successfully manage, create a genuinely brilliant, exciting effect. But there are a few places where attention to the marked tempi might have helped their interpretation. The slow movement of Op 18 No 1 is beautifully played but with a more flowing accompaniment the music would have made a greater impact. Similarly, at a faster tempo the second movement of Op 18 No 4 could have shown more of the *scherzoso* quality that Beethoven asks for. However, the moderately paced finale of Op 127 (with no metronome mark or tempo indication) is strikingly successful, with its finely balanced textures and sensitive *legato* phrasing. All in all, this

promises to be an outstanding set – not the last word on these endlessly fascinating works, perhaps, but performances of great artistry and perception. **Duncan Druce**

Selected comparison:

Alban Berg Qt (EMI) 573606-2

Cage

'How to Get Out of the Cage: A Year with John Cage'

A film by **Frank Scheffer**

EuroArts © 205 9168

(144' • NTSC • 16:9/4:3 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)



**Scheffer's re-cut film
as well as five of Cage's own**

If, as the naysayers and cynics maintain, no one could possibly be interested in actually, you know, listening to the music of John Cage, then fewer people still are likely to take any interest in the experimental films that Cage made towards the end of his life. This DVD contains five of those films – *Chessfilmnoise*, *Wagner's*

Ring, *Nopera*, *Ryoanji* and *Stoperas I & II* – an appendix to *How to Get Out of the Cage: A Year with John Cage*, a new version of a film originally produced in 1987 which director Frank Scheffer has re-edited for the past year's Cage centenary. That 1987 film paired Cage with Elliott Carter but this new version leaves all the Carter material on the cutting room floor. Scheffer eschewed his usual method of cutting his Cage films using chance procedures; the aim here was to 'inform' and to 'appeal to a younger audience'.

It's job done as far as those aspirations are concerned. He clearly enjoyed talking to Scheffer and, even by Cage's standards, the juicy quotes come thick and fast. 'I make music not as a composer but as a listener too,' Cage tells him, the inference being that he wants sounds to have life beyond his input as composer: he too wants to be surprised by how his structures might develop over time. During a discussion about Arnold Schoenberg's famous statement about him having no ear for

harmony, Cage says he's interested in 'noise' that is 'beyond the scope of harmony'. As for chance procedures: 'Each thing that happens is the best thing that could happen.'

The five films – especially *Wagner's Ring* (a complete *Ring* cycle condensed into four minutes with no sound!) – might be more of a stretch for Cage newbies. My advice? Watch *Ryoanji* first and marvel at how Cage unifies sound and image. The controversies are set to endure but the art speaks for itself. **Philip Clark**

Dvořák

'Silent Woods – Original Works

and Transcriptions for Cello and Piano'

Sonatina, Op 100. Rondo, Op 94. Silent Woods, Op 68 No 5. Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op 55 No 4. Good Night, Op 73 No 1. Polonaise, Op *posth.* Larghetto, Op 75a No 4. Rusalka – Song to the Moon. *Lasst mich allein*, Op 82 No 1

Christian Poltéra vc **Kathryn Stott** pf

BIS Ⓢ BIS-SACD1947 (65' • DDD/DSD)



Adaptations and originals from former New Generation artist

In the slow movement of his Cello Concerto, Dvořák quotes from his song 'Lasst mich allein', a favourite of his sister-in-law Josefina Kaunic, who died while the concerto was being written. A cello transcription of the song by Christian Poltéra therefore makes a fitting and touching envoi to this programme, in which Poltéra and Kathryn Stott play several works that were either composed or arranged for cello by Dvořák himself, and a number of others for which Poltéra has detected the cello's potential.

Chief among these is the G major Violin Sonatina, which works particularly well in its new baritone and tenor register. The meditative *Larghetto* assumes a mellower, more nostalgically autumnal quality, while the *Scherzo* and the outer movements, far from sacrificing any of their spirit and animation, gain in resonance. This attests to both the sensitive way in which Poltéra has adapted the music to the cello medium and to the deft and affectionate manner in which he plays it. So natural does the Sonatina sound on the cello that you wonder why Dvořák himself never thought of doing it. He did, however, recast a movement, retitled 'Waldesruhe' or 'Silent Woods', from the piano duet cycle *From the Bohemian Forest*, and he wrote an A major Polonaise for his cellist friend Alois Neruda and a G minor Rondo for Hanuš Wihan, the cellist who inspired the Concerto. These sit happily alongside Poltéra's own arrangements, including a lovely 'Song to the Moon', in a recital of appealing warmth. **Geoffrey Norris**

Fauré

Piano Trio, Op 120. Piano Quintet No 2, Op 115.

La bonne chanson, Op 61^a

^a**Ivan Ludlow** bar **London Bridge Ensemble**

Sonimage Ⓢ SON11203 (79' • DDD)



Multi-configured Fauré from the London Bridge Ensemble

The unorthodox line-up of the London Bridge Ensemble means that it can create enterprising programmes with ease, though for this disc it does call upon the services of violinist Matthew Truscott and bass player Graham Mitchell too. *La bonne chanson* is the earliest piece here, sung with great warmth by baritone Ivan Ludlow, particularly the last song, with its intertwining imagery of the burgeoning of love and spring. Turn to Anne Sofie von Otter here and you find a rather more ethereal approach (which isn't simply down to voice type). She also offers a more flitting, reactive reading of 'N'est-ce pas?'. In 'La lune blanche' Ludlow is mellifluous and confiding; but von Otter's greater fragility and the way she embraces the language itself is more magical still.

Fauré's Piano Trio dates from the year before he died. Trio George Sand made a very strong case for it recently, particularly in their duetting between violin and cello in the second movement – a real test of tonal beauty, also wonderfully conveyed in the Poltéra/Mitchell/Stott reading. This new set treads a middle ground, not as emotionally fraught as some but always warm, letting Fauré's exquisite lines speak for themselves. The extraordinary finale, which, with its jagged contours and darting phrases, forms such an unexpected riposte to what has gone before, demands virtuosity, synchronicity and edginess without violence. Trio George Sand are gentler than some, while the Capuçons are surprisingly laid back here. The London Bridge Ensemble aren't afraid to tell it like it is, something they have in common with the Florestan.

The disc opens with another extraordinary late masterpiece: the Second Quintet. Here the new version has strong competition from the Quatuor Ebène with Angelich, thankfully one of the more successful sonic experiences in Virgin's set. It's a work the Ebène relish, combining a breakneck speed in the second movement with an almost merciless clarity, something the new group cannot quite match. But in the slow movement – the work's beating heart – the tables are turned. It always makes me think of late Beethoven quartets, not least because that opening upward sixth echoes so powerfully that of the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Op 132, and the LBE fully reveal its otherworldliness, its apparent suspension of time, in playing that is as compelling as it is rapt. **Harriet Smith**

Pf Trio – selected comparisons:

Florestan Trio (3/00) (HYPE) CDA67114

R & G Capuçon, Angelich (12/11) (VIRG) 070875-2

Stott, Poltéra, Mitchell (CHAN) CHAN10447

Trio George Sand (ZZT) ZZT120101

Pf Qnt No 2 – selected comparison:

Ebène Qt, Angelich (12/11) (VIRG) 070875-2

Bonne chanson – selected comparison:

Von Otter (1/98) (DG) 447 752-2GH

Schumann

Piano Trio No 2, Op 80. Piano Quartet, Op 47^a.

Kinderszenen, Op 15^b

Benvenue Fortepiano Trio (Eric Zivian pf Monica

Huggett vn Tanya Tomkins vc) with **Adam LaMotte** va

Avie Ⓢ AV2272 (71' • DDD)



Latest in the BFT's period-instrument Schumann project

It was through the Piano Quartet that my love affair with Schumann's chamber music began, when, as a student, I encountered the Albeni Quartet's reading with Thomas Rajna on a CRD LP. Then it was the slow movement that stole my heart. I still find it a good starting point in any new reading of the work. Period instruments are still – perhaps surprisingly – a relative rarity in this repertoire. And it's in the Quartet that the Benvenue Fortepiano Trio is at its most convincing, the addition of viola player Adam LaMotte redressing what can elsewhere be a violin-heavy focus. The *Scherzo* has plenty of buoyancy and the finale is also high on adrenalin, though no one captures its propulsion quite as brilliantly as Argerich in her various recordings, while there are more characterful interpreters of that voluptuous slow movement cello melody, not least from the excellent Jerusalem Quartet with Alexander Melnikov.

The remainder of the disc is less successful. There are more imaginative accounts of *Kinderszenen* than Eric Zivian's: desynchronised hands are no substitute for poetry in the opening number and the bass is overbearing in 'Wichtige Begebenheit', while even 'Träumerei' sounds a tad prosaic. In their very different ways, Horowitz, Lupu, Argerich and Freire make a much more compelling case for this music.

The piano trios are now dominated by the Gramophone Award-winning Andsnes/Tetzlaff set. And it's in this piece that the greatest doubts arise. For a start, Monica Huggett's tuning is frequently awry, souring Schumann's arching lines. And the composer's characteristic accentuation – admittedly a fragile balance between impetus and exaggeration – tips over into insistence too much for my taste. Of the four movements, the canonic third comes off best; but frankly this is not competitive.

Harriet Smith

Pf Trio No 2 – selected comparison:

Andsnes, C & T Tetzlaff (7/11) (EMI) 094180-2

Pf Qt – selected comparisons:

Argerich, R & G Capuçon, Chen (10/07) (EMI) 389241-2

Melnikov, Jerusalem Qt (7/12) (HARM) HMC90 2122

Telemann

'Telemann:Time:Travel'

Essercizii musicali, TWV42 - Solo IV; Solo X; Trio IV. Sonate metodiche, TWV41 - Sonata III; Sonata VI. Six Concerts et Six Suites, TWV42 - Concerto V. Sonata, TWV42:a7

Passacaglia

Barn Cottage Records © BCR006 (69' • DDD)



Passacaglia play seven varied trios by Telemann

Sometimes, especially in Baroque music where even the most engaging music can tend towards the wallpaper if played with even the merest hint of glibness, it takes a particular type of performance to tip a piece's appearance over the edge from pretty into complexly beautiful. And, again especially in Baroque music where the potential for the contrast between the two is so great, reaching that tipping point can create effects like an almost psychedelic world opening up before you; the ordered lines of the track listings on this disc belie the relentless creativity and imagination behind the tiny vignettes that make up its many movements.

The best historically informed performances and recordings recreate the spirit as well as the sound of the music and, in 'Telemann:Time:Travel', the now well-established group Passacaglia do just that, combining the two to make a performance of irrepressible joy. They absorb the virtuosity in the complex lines of this music so totally that it in no way interferes with the subtlety of their phrasing: the performance, led (not dominated) by Annabel Knight's phosphorescent top line, teases out Telemann's rhythmic and melodic jokes, idiosyncracies and brainteasers with such effortless energy that it is hard to believe that many of the recordings of these contrasting collections of works, presenting them as little more than academic and entrepreneurial musings, ever existed. **Caroline Gill**

'A Doll's House'

D Bedford *Bash Peace* S Copeland *Breather*

Fitkin Shard N Hayes *Dance Play* Leach *Echolia*

McGarr *Sound Asleep* Montague *Rimfire* Skempton

Slip-stream K Tippett *Dance of the Dragonfly*

Ensemble Bash

Signum © SIGCD294 (51' • DDD)



Ensemble Bash record British works they commissioned

'A Doll's House' is a collection of mostly short (two- to six-minute) and refreshingly varied pieces by British composers born between 1943 and 1973, commissioned and performed by the percussion quartet Ensemble Bash, now celebrating its 20th anniversary. Their crisp precision and commitment to each work is abetted by

vividly close-up and detailed engineering plus rapid DJ-like segues between selections that create a seamless, sustained programme.

Listeners familiar with Graham Fitkin's post-minimalist mastery or Howard Skempton's stark delicacy will know what to expect from their opening contributions, although the non-verbal vocalisations and cowbell effects throughout Stephen Montague's *Rimfire* reveal an airy, whimsical side to a composer I know more for his driving intensity. The late David Bedford's *Bash Peace* is a lilting, evocative duet for steel pans, leading into Nick Hayes's *Dance Play* for marimba, vibraphones and drum-set, which is essentially a samba with quirky rhythmic parantheses. By contrast, Peter McGarr's *Sound Asleep* is a collage incorporating a multitude of instruments and non-instruments from glass chimes and pitch pipes to wine glass and egg slicer.

While Stewart Copeland's *Breather* is light and improvisatory, Rachel Leach's *Echolia* rigorously manipulates repeated phrases from one instrument to another. The facile fingerwork and melodic sophistication characterising veteran jazz pianist/composer Keith Tippett's instrumental prowess replicates itself over the 15-minute course of this programme's concluding work, *Dance of the Dragonfly*, which abounds in twitchy yet virtuoso single lines, sudden explosions into free jazz, silences where you don't expect them, shimmering fills from shakers and subtle, low-lying tremolos. **Jed Distler**

'Duo'

Brahms Cello Sonata No 1, Op 38 Debussy Cello

Sonata Schumann Drei Fantasiestücke, Op 73

Shostakovich Cello Sonata, Op 40

Sol Gabetta vc Hélène Grimaud pf

DG © 479 0090GH (75' • DDD)



Grimaud and Gabetta united for sonatas and a fantasy

Sol Gabetta has always had a singular ability to make the cello sing in an oddly delicate and feminine way – a truly satisfying and exciting contrast for a musician who has often entertained a reputation for being somewhat of a musical imp. Combined with Hélène Grimaud's image as the beautiful punk rocker of classical music, this disc has the potential to be something really unique.

There is a lightness to all the performances that creates an engagingly lyrical sound that is pleasurable to listen to. This works particularly well, for instance, in the Debussy Sonata, the drive of which unfolds between them as if the music is properly in their blood, but loses much of its effect in the Shostakovich, which simply doesn't work as the graphic depiction of menace and cold that it should be without some unselfconscious ugliness in the performance.

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

More Reich from Kuniko

Japanese percussionist Kuniko (below) has recently recorded the follow-up to her 2011 album 'Kuniko Plays Reich', the new disc containing the first recording of the same composer's *New York Counterpoint* in a version for marimba. Linn will release the disc, also to include music by Arvo Pärt, in April.



Flute concertos from Bryan

Also on Linn, flautist Katherine Bryan will follow her delicious 2010 recording of concertos by Lowell Liebermann and Carl Nielsen with *concertante* works by Christopher Rouse, Jacques Ibert and Frank Martin. Bryan's own orchestra, the RSNO, joined her in the studio for the sessions and the disc is released in May.

Bach from Brecon

Rachel Podger's home-grown ensemble Brecon Baroque has been back in action in Wales, again for the microphones of Channel Classics. Podger played and directed concertos for two violins, for violin and oboe, and for violin, flute and harpsichord by Johann Sebastian Bach. Channel will release the SACD recording in the spring.

Skrowaczewski's Bruckner

Stanisław Skrowaczewski's atmosphere-charged concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the autumn, championed for *Gramophone* by Michael McManus, included a performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony that was recorded live at the concert on October 24 with a view to release on CD. We will look out for news on any public release.

Pavel Haas Schubert

Following their Award-winning 2010 Dvořák disc, the Pavel Haas Quartet will venture once more beyond their native Czech Republic, recording Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet and String Quintet in early 2013. Supraphon will release the disc in September.



Tentative partnership: Hélène Grimaud and Sol Gabetta

The middle line is most effectively trodden in the Schumann *Fantasy Pieces* and the Brahms Sonata. Here, the delicacy of the playing is put to greatest use – the elegance of the Bachian fugues in the outer movements of the Brahms brings out the clarity of the lines and, as a result, the composer's own skill as a technician.

But, as most clearly illustrated by the Shostakovich, luminosity is not always necessarily what is needed. That this disc falls down a little by way of its great delicacy and slight tentativeness (perhaps symptomatic of this being the first duo recording for both) would not be in any way a criticism to most musical collaborations. That it is to Grimaud and Gabetta is simply testament to their potential as a truly incendiary collaboration. This disc is more than enjoyable but what is truly exciting is what they may do next.

Caroline Gill

'Fantasticus'

Bertali Sonata a 2 in D minor **Buxtehude** Sonata and Suite, BuxWV273. Sonata a 2, BuxWV272
J Jenkins Fantasia in D minor **Kertzing** (attrib) Sonatina in D minor **Muffat** Passacaglia in G minor
Pandolfi Mealli Sonata 'La castella' **Schmelzer** Sonata a 2 in A minor **Stradella** Sinfonia No 22
Fantasticus
 Resonus ® RES10112 (69' • DDD)



Debut recording for Amsterdam-based trio

Fantasticus are an Amsterdam-based trio consisting of a Japanese violinist, an English gambist/cellist and an Argentinian harpsichordist, and this disc is named, rather like rock bands' first albums used to be in the 1970s, after themselves. Except, of course, that they have taken their own name from the *stylus fantasticus*, the mode of instrumental composition in vogue during the 17th century. From Castello through Biber to Buxtehude, its free-form sonatas with short contrasting sections have become increasingly popular with today's audiences and a trawl round the early music competitions would show that it has attractions for young ensembles as well. And why not? It is dashing, virtuoso, exciting, changeable, and offers opportunities all round for free expression and improvisation.

Fantasticus make an impressive job of it, treading a canny line between characterising the individual sections of each piece and maintaining its wholeness and unity. The Stradella Sonata which opens the programme sets the tone with a bold, striding dialogue between violin and cello, a Bertali Sonata breathes deeply and widely, and Pandolfi

Mealli's *La castella* finds something a little bit quirkier. Elsewhere, the more formal structures of Schmelzer or Muffat are respected, while in two sonatas by Buxtehude – who can be seen here as a culminating figure of *fantasticus* – his springy rhythmic energy and surefooted momentum shine out. This is music-making of maturity, its evident free spirit and exuberance of line allied to control and expressed in impeccable ensemble-playing.

The sound is clear, with just the right amount of churchy bloom to prevent the rather pleasing astringency of Rie Kimura's violin from passing into edginess. The harpsichord is fruity and twangy, with Guillermo Brachetta's abundant invention stopping short of obtrusive fussiness, and Robert Smith's gamba and cello sing out heartily. A striking and enjoyable debut. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Idylls and Bacchanals'

'Viola Sonatas'

Bax Viola Sonata **Jacob** Sonatina for Viola and Piano **Leighton** Fantasia on the Name BACH
McEwen Viola Sonata. Breath o' June.
 Improvisations provençales[®] **Maconchy** Viola Sonata **Milford** Four Pieces for Viola and Piano
Rawsthorne Viola Sonata
Louise Williams *va/vn* **David Owen Norris** *pf*
 EM Records ® ② EMRCD007/8 (134' • DDD)



English works from Endellion Quartet's founder viola player

British viola music appears to be enjoying something of a renaissance at the moment, what with several recent recordings of repertoire now being available from Chandos and Naxos. This double-CD recording features viola player Louise Williams (and her delicious 1616 Amati) and pianist David Owen Norris in a highly varied programme mainly, but not exclusively, of sonatas.

The earliest work is in fact the Sonata by Bax, composed in 1921-22. Bax clearly loved the viola and its melancholy hue, and Williams makes much of the instrument's low register in those moments of deep pensiveness. In many ways this is a concerto *manqué*, for I can often hear the orchestra in the lyrical effusions for the piano (assiduously explored by Owen Norris); indeed, like so much of Bax's scandalously neglected chamber music, the dialogue between viola and piano is positively symphonic and Bax's piano-writing has an orchestral demeanour with an array of colours. McEwen, who, like Bax, studied at the Royal Academy Music, had as a common teacher Frederick Corder, whose outlook was less wedded to the Brahmsian intellectualism of the Royal College of Music. Though in some ways more sombre than the Bax, the late Sonata of 1941 possesses a picturesqueness and colour which invades its Scottish character, while the *Improvisations provençales* (played on the violin), with their affecting modality, and the plangent *Breath o' June* capture appealing vignettes of Gallic life that are located stylistically between de Séverac and Frank Bridge.

On the second CD, the works are more violently contrasted. Milford's euphonious Four Pieces, mostly still in manuscript, were written in 1935 and have a lyrical introspection in their extended melodic lines and diatonic harmony. Rawsthorne's virtuoso work, breathless in its faster tempi (the *moto perpetuo* of the *Scherzo* is a *tour de force*), owes something to Hindemith and the acerbic neo-classicism of the 1930s. Machonchy's ruminative and at times disturbing Sonata of 1938 is a compelling work, full of dynamic rhythm and restlessness, evocative of the uncertainties of the time. Written after the Second World War in 1949, Jacob's Sonatina is an attractive work – a reminder perhaps that he was capable of great craftsmanship and affecting melody expressed with an admixture of post-Romantic and neo-classical sensibilities. Kenneth Leighton's *Fantasia on the Name BACH* of 1956 encapsulates the composer's preoccupation with counterpoint which is here manipulated with great dexterity and power. Yet, for all its mordant severity, there are moments of great expressive beauty, troubled by an inner

melancholy. A more detailed programme note, by Owen Norris, can be found at the English Music Festival's website. **Jeremy Dibble**

'Scenes from a New Music Séance'

Amirkhanian Rippling the Lamp^a **Antheil** Sonata No 2^b **Christiansen** Den Arkadiske, Op 32^a **Cowell** Violin Sonata - Ballade^a **Crawford** Violin Sonata^a **Gudmundsen-Holmgreen** Double^a **Hauer** Jazz, Op 41 No 5^a **Hovhaness** Khirgiz Suite, Op 73^a **Neuburg** Nonette **RB Smith** Tombeau^a **Kate Stenberg** *vn*^a **Eva-Maria Zimmermann** *pf*^b **Charles Amirkhanian** *drums*
Other Minds Ⓢ OM1019-2 (75' • DDD)




San Francisco's day-long 'séance' captured on disc

While the living are central to the progressive Other Minds festivals in San Francisco, this violin-and-piano spin-off recording features works by the American pioneers (plus Hauer's tiny, uncharacteristic *Jazz*) – musical grandfathers, as it were, of its featured composers – and it's the older composers' works that are the most interesting. Finest of all is Ruth Crawford's Sonata (1926), a superb four-movement work in the American pioneer tradition. So too is Cowell's five-span Sonata (1945), but sadly only the lovely central Ballade is included. Antheil's single-movement Second (1923) piles one song quotation on top of another in Ivesian fashion, before encountering the New Englander's music, while the three Webern-sized movements of Hovhaness's *Khigiz Suite* (1951) are as far removed as could be imagined from the Austrian's mature work.

So to the living, mostly. *Double* (1994) is a diptych by Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (b1932), often pigeonholed as a Danish minimalist but far more subtle (and subversive) – as is *Double*. *Den Arkadiske* ('Arcadia', 1966) by his compatriot and contemporary Henning Christiansen (1932-2008) is, by contrast, unwaveringly minimalist. The folk-like subject, repeated ad nauseam, outstays its welcome long before its 10 minutes are up. If that is Arcadia, I would hate to visit Hell...


Less maddening are *Rippling the Lamp* (1994), a curious meditation on part of Burkhard's Violin Concerto by Charles Amirkhanian (b1945; also the booklet annotator) and the multitracked *Nonette* (2010) by Amy Neuburg (b1962), written for Kate Stenberg accompanied by eight pre-recorded channels of her playing. *Tombeau* (2006) is a quiet memorial for Stenberg's father, Donald, by Canadian Ronald Bruce Smith (b1959).

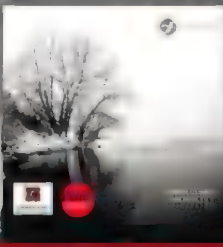
Stenberg and Eva-Maria Zimmermann deliver each piece with commendable commitment, and Judith Sherman's sound is very fine but the disc seems less than the sum of its parts. **Guy Rickards**



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Instrumental



Jeremy Nicholas on Luiza Borac's Dinu Lipatti exploration:

'Borac finds just the right playful touch and plays with the same breezy confidence as Lipatti himself' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



Bryce Morrison on a Russian recital from Alexander Ghindin:

'He is a pianist who embraces his programme with a powerful, highly individual eloquence' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

Beethoven

B

Diabelli Variations, Op 120, plus variations by Assmayer, Bocklet, Czapek, C & J Czerny, Dreschler, Freystädtler, Gänsbacher, Gelinek, Halm, J Hoffmann, Horzalka, Huglmann, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kerzkowsky, Kreutzer, Lannoy, Leidesdorf, Liszt, Moscheles, WA Mozart Jnr, Rieger, Roser, Schubert, Stadler, Szalay, Tomášek, Winkler, Vitásek and Voříšek

Jörg Demus *pf*

Eloquence © ② 480 3303 (101' • ADD)

Recorded 1971

Beethoven

Diabelli Variations, Op 120. Six Bagatelles, Op 126

Daniel-Ben Pienaar *pf*

Avie © AV2260 (68' • DDD)



Forty years separate Demus's 'period' Diabellis and Pienaar's modern set

Eloquence presents the first CD publication of a 1971 two-LP set originally issued in DG's Archiv series, featuring Jörg Demus on period instruments playing 32 out of the 50 variations Anton Diabelli commissioned from various composers for his famous anthology, along with Beethoven's 33 Variations, Op 120. Demus's non-Beethoven selections were based both on musical quality and the need to contain the music within the limits of a single LP (a few years later Rudolf Buchbinder became the first to record the Diabelli collection complete). In general, Demus chose well. Some of the strongest pieces include Kalkbrenner's quasi-Schubertian harmonic pointing, the real Schubert's gorgeous minor-key contribution, interesting metrical displacements from Jacob Freystädtler plus a complex, sophisticated coda by Carl Czerny.

While the 1839 Graf instrument used for the Beethoven work gives an idea of what the composer's last piano might have sounded like, Demus's pianism hits and misses. The *maestoso* Var 1 marches with a stiff, lumbering leg, No 6's trills are not consistently controlled, while less than nimble timing undermines the humour that binds No 13's dotted rhythms, wide dynamic extremes and silences. Nor do



Daniel-Ben Pienaar: viewing the Diabellis as a virtuoso vehicle

the virtuoso demands of Nos 15, 16 and 17 match Andreas Staier's effortless power, although Demus dazzlingly sails through No 23's 'BANG...scamper scamper scamper' patterns and brings admirable ebb and flow to No 31's lyrical arabesques.

If you view the *Diabelli* Variations as a virtuoso vehicle rather than a large-scale Beethoven drama, then consider Daniel-Ben Pienaar's facile, often glib, sometimes fussy interpretation. Right off the bat he slows down the main theme's tempo in the second eight bars, plays No 2's alternating chords unevenly, sometimes rounds off No 6's trumpeting trills, while No 10's *presto* tempo runs away from him, in contrast to Stephen Kovacevich's comparable yet far steadier excitement. Pienaar's gratuitous *ritards* in No 13 ruin the composer's built-in jokery and his habit of not playing hands together for expressive effect

makes No 18's plaintive introspection sound cheap. The aforementioned No 23 lacks sufficient dynamic contrast between the 'bangs' and 'scampers'. By contrast, No 28's stern accents hit home, albeit at a slower tempo than Beethoven's *vivace* marking suggests (Brendel truly lets loose here). Similar virtues and drawbacks make themselves felt throughout the Op 126 Bagatelles (hands not together in No 4, a breathless *presto* introduction to No 6 but a simple and eloquent No 3). In short, Kovacevich's Onyx remake remains the catalogue's reference *Diabelli* Variations available on a single disc; but please keep lobbying for the reissue of Charles Rosen's towering version or the second (and better) of Peter Serkin's two traversals. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparisons:

Kovacevich (1/09) (ONYX) ONYX4035

Staier (8/12) (HARM) HMC90 2091

Chopin · Schumann

Chopin Mazurka No 27, Op 41 No 2. Nocturne No 16, Op 55 No 2 **Schumann** Kinderszenen, Op 15.

Papillons, Op 2

Katia Bronska *pf*

Aparté © APO39 (48' • DDD)



New to Aparté: Polish-Parisian pianist trained in Russia

Katia Bronska is a new name to me, though presumably she has been around for some time as in 1987 she won the Grand Prix of the Fondation de France. 'Polish by birth, Parisian by adoption,' says the booklet, adding that 'she has captivated audiences around the world, meeting with triumph and success in great cities such as Paris, New York and London...In her concerts she has captivated listeners in raptures of emotion.' If this isn't a vanity recording, then it certainly reads like one.

In fact, Bronska's playing frequently overcame such preconceptions. Intimately recorded, these are unmanipulated performances of laudable integrity. Does *Papillons* have quite enough rhythmic freedom, quite the same imagination and caprice as, say, Kempff (1967) or Hamelin (2002)? No. Does her scrupulously observed *Kinderszenen* charm like Cortot (1935)? No, but Bronska's air of private reverie brings its own reward, despite what must claim to be the slowest 'Träumerei' on record: it has the rhythmic pulse of a musical box that needs winding up. This programme of technically unchallenging works concludes with Chopin's lovely E flat major Nocturne, Op 55 No 2, which, clocking in at a barely sustainable 6'06", extends the total time of the disc to 47'53".

Katia Bronska is clearly an able pianist but with such strong competition in these oft-recorded pieces and without a major marketing campaign to promote her I can't see how this release is going to make much of an impact.

Jeremy Nicholas

Chopin

Ballade No 1, Op 23. Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57. Nocturnes - No 2, Op 9 No 2; No 3, Op 9 No 3. Four Mazurkas, Op 17. Three Mazurkas, Op 50.

Three Waltzes, Op 64

Anne-Marie McDermott *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9359 (68' • DDD)



The American pianist turns from Gershwin to Chopin

Here is a Chopin recital to make you think again. Anne-Marie McDermott, whose records, notably of Bach and Prokofiev, have won the highest praise, now turns her intense and unwavering light on a very different and ever-elusive genius. Rarely has Chopin been so decidedly taken out of the salon and made to speak with such a dark, rich and full eloquence.

How many pianists have opened the G minor Ballade with such grandeur and significance or sounded such a desolating note in the A minor Mazurka, Op 17 No 4? Even when you find the dancers heavy on their feet in the last two Op 64 Waltzes, you recall a delectably light-fingered spin through the first in D flat, and a startling demonstration of both musical and technical prowess in the Barcarolle. The emphasis in the Mazurkas is on their essential quiddity, their transformation of basic or rudimentary elements into an often interior and audacious magic. True, McDermott can bear down heavily on the B major Nocturne, Op 9 No 3, and her unremitting seriousness can become claustrophobic in the Berceuse. But overall such a dramatic reappraisal lifts Chopin far above more familiar glamorous and facile considerations. The Ballade, in particular, is superb. **Bryce Morrison**

Chopin

Four Mazurkas, Op 30. Two Nocturnes, Op 27. Preludes, Op 28. Scherzo No 2, Op 31

Maurizio Pollini *pf*

DG © 477 9530GH (60' • DDD)



Pollini's Preludes and his first recorded Op 30 Mazurkas

Pollini first made his mark in Chopin, his gleaming sonority and imperious command a source of wonder to Rubinstein at the 1960 Warsaw Competition. Alas, such things are now of the past and Pollini's return aged 70 to a much-beloved composer is for the most part a tired and sober-suited affair. True, something of his former voltage returns in the storming progression of the 12th Prelude but elsewhere, particularly in the more lyrically inclined Preludes, there is little sense of magic or wonder, with Chopin's wildly fluctuating mood swings kept very much at arm's length. The second Prelude, among Chopin's most morbid utterances, is perversely sanitised, its sickness returned to health. No 10 lacks processional grandeur, while in the improvisatory charms of No 13 he is restrained to the point of plainness.

The four Op 30 Mazurkas, new to Pollini's discography, show the same lack of freedom and how I missed the neurotic edge Horowitz brought to the astonishingly prophetic and far-sighted Op 27 C sharp minor Nocturne. Overall, this sounds like a labour of duty rather than love, leaving me to return to Pollini's magisterial early DG disc of the Preludes, to Testament's release of Pollini's first recording of the Etudes (issued very much against the pianist's will) and to memories of an unforgettable Queen Elizabeth Hall all-Chopin recital given at the start of Pollini's stellar career. DG's sound is as warm as it is brilliant.

Bryce Morrison

Craven

Set for Piano

Mary Dullea *pf*

Métier © MSV28525 (69' • DDD)



No titles, no dates: Craven's 'neutral' cycle of piano works

Eric Craven's *Set for Piano* – not merely performed but 'realised and performed', the cover art declares, by Cork-born pianist Mary Dullea – is an essay about the nature and poesis of musical language. Métier's booklet-notes tell us that Craven was born in Moston ('in a part of Manchester disadvantaged by the epithet "disadvantaged"') and that he packed up his day job as a maths and music teacher to concentrate on composition after surviving cancer. Specific dates are notable by their absence, though. We're not told when Craven was born, nor when his health problems intervened. Nor are any of *Set for Piano*'s 12 sections given a date. Craven clearly prefers to keep himself out of the story.

And it's anonymity all the way. *Set for Piano* is a strikingly nameless, neutral title; each individual piece gets identified only by its number in the unfolding sequence. Dullea must 'realise' Craven's intentions because tempo and dynamics are left to the performer's discretion. 'Twelve' is notated with unbarred, vertical line-ups of notes that the pianist is invited to sculpt into meaningful phrases and overarching paragraphs.

But if all this talk of unbarred music and quasi-graphic notation makes you think of Cornelius Cardew, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman et al, you couldn't be more wrong. Much of *Set for Piano* is abrasively, wantonly tonal – abrasive in the sense that Craven's tonality is literal and daringly untreated; triads shocking in their nakedness. 'Two' and 'Four' flirt with Romanticism (albeit filtered via Bill Evans); other pieces are sketched over memories of Baroque lines. But Craven's aloof distance from his material makes these stylistic reference points fade, refocusing attention on a renewed pool of raw gestures. He cuts across stylistic allegiances, those same old same old allegiances that box so many composers in.

Dates become meaningless. *Set for Piano* might have been written 50 years ago; could probably be written at any point in the future too. What's more, I don't *want* to know when it was written. I prefer to suspend my disbelief.

Philip Clark


Lipatti

Lipatti Concertino en style classique, Op 3^a.

Sonatine for the Left Hand. Piano Sonata, 'Music is the Language of Gods'. Nocturne, Op 6. Nocturne on a Moldovan Theme. Fantaisie, Op 8 **Albeniz/**

Lipatti Navarra **JS Bach/Lipatti** Pastorale, BWV590. Cantata No 208, 'Hunt Cantata' – two movts

Luiza Borac *pf*

^aAcademy of St Martin in the Fields / Jaime Martin
Avie   AV2271 (111' • DDD)



Borac makes the case for her great compatriot's music

Concertino en style classique has four short movements (17'56" overall) of chic Baroque pastiche, the first movement at times edging dangerously close to plagiarism. JSB would surely have smiled approvingly, especially at the effervescent courante-like third movement and the syncopated rhythms of the finale. Throughout, the woodwind section is kept inventively busy, underpinned by discreet kettledrum contributions. Luiza Borac finds just the right playful touch for a work which would do well in the concert hall should anyone have the imagination to follow her, Walter Gieseking and Clara Haskil's example.

Again, Lipatti's 1941 *Sonatine* merits wider attention, 'a trifle in three brief movements,' wrote the composer, 'which I finished in two days [using] purely Romanian themes and with much brio'. It is dedicated to Lipatti's teacher and fellow countryman Mihail Jora (1891-1971) and is written for the left hand alone. Jora had only one leg. Who said composers don't have a sense of humour?

Borac plays with the same breezy confidence as Lipatti himself, who recorded both works in 1943. They made it on to LP (Electrecord ECE0766/7) but not, as far as I'm aware, on to CD – and anything of Lipatti is worth promulgating, despite the foggy sound. These, the two sombre but rather attractive Nocturnes, the masterly transcriptions of Bach's Pastorale for organ, BWV590, and two movements from the *Hunt* Cantata (one of which is 'Sheep may safely graze') appeared on a 1988 Dynamic CD. The new versions are superior in every way.

Not included on the Dynamic disc is Lipatti's Sonata in D minor, written when he was nearing his 15th birthday. No Korngold he – it sounds like a student work in which he is still finding his own voice and, in the final *Allegro*, showing us that he can write a competent Baroque fugue. This is a world premiere recording, as is that of the *Fantaisie* (1940), Lipatti's longest and most harmonically advanced work – five dissonant movements using folkloric melodies and complex rhythmic patterns. Completing the survey is Lipatti's arrangement of Albéniz's *Navarra*. I can spot no significant changes to the standard completion of the work by Déodat de Séverac, and Miss Borac takes a disappointingly literal view of the piece. Compared to the blistering accounts by Rubinstein (1929) or Nelson Freire (1984), it's an enervating *Navarra*.

Jeremy Nicholas

Mozart

'Keyboard Music, Vol 4'

Piano Sonatas – No 5, K283; No 9, K311.
Fantasia, K397. Prelude and Fugue, K394.
Variations on 'Je suis Lindor', K354

Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp*

Harmonia Mundi  HMU90 7528 (71' • DDD)

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 22, K482.

Rondo, K386

Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp*

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Petra Müllejlans *vn*

Harmonia Mundi  HMC90 2147 (73' • DDD)



Bezuidenhout's Mozart cycle continues with solo works and piano concertos

The fourth instalment in Kristian Bezuidenhout's Mozart solo keyboard music cycle proves remarkably consistent in relation to the previous three volumes, regarding the fortepianist's superb technical acumen and musical intelligence, as well as interpretative affectations that seem more precious than stylish. It's little details that give Bezuidenhout away, such as the contrived *ritard* in the second subject of K311's first movement or the slow movement's dynamic hairpins that draw attention to themselves rather than the melodic trajectory. Here Ronald Brautigam (BIS) is more subtle and straightforward. Also observe Bezuidenhout's agogic stresses in the C major Fugue, K394, compared alongside Brautigam making interpretative points more through articulation and balancing of lines. At the same time, one ought to credit and (hopefully) admire Bezuidenhout's elegantly turned left-hand work in K283's finale and his assiduous tempo relationships throughout the *Je suis Lindor* Variations. Bezuidenhout opens the disc with the D minor Fantasia, K397, as it exists in manuscript, minus its concluding bars, which allow the pianist to dovetail seamlessly into K311's opening measures. After K283, Bezuidenhout reprises the Fantasia with the standard ending, believed to have been penned by August Eberhard Müller.

Bezuidenhout's Mozart concerto collaborations with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra were recorded with a microphone set-up that places the keyboard in the centre, winds in a line facing the piano and strings both around and behind the piano. In addition, orchestral players are given free rein to embellish their solo lines, while the K386 Rondo's *piano* and *forte* markings respectively represent solo and *tutti* string textures, as per the Bilson/Gardiner recording (Archiv). Other quiet moments assigned to solo strings include the C major variation in K482's *Andante* and the same concerto's third-movement A flat

major *Andante cantabile*. There's much to savour in the energy and zest that the musicians bring to both concertos' sprightly outer movements, yet the strings' scrawny sonorities obscure the expressive potential more fully realised by the English Baroque Soloists. K453's central *Andante* exemplifies what I mean: Gardiner's violin section's more focused tone and minutely calibrated dynamic swells in lieu of vibrato contrast with the more pronounced and fragmented results that the FBO's violins produce. Furthermore, despite Bezuidenhout's sincere efforts on behalf of equal say between soloist and orchestra, the recorded balance seems to make his brightly voiced instrument dominate, in contrast to Bilson/Gardiner's clearer orchestral image and more judicious balances. Despite these reservations, however, Bezuidenhout's spirited style and authoritative fingerwork never operate at less than world-class standards.


Jed Distler

Rachmaninov

'Solo Piano Recordings, Vol 3 – 1925-1942'

Bach Partita No 3, BWV1006 (arr Rachmaninov)
Kreisler Liebesfreud (arr Rachmaninov – two recordings)
Mendelssohn A Midsummer Night's Dream – Scherzo (arr Rachmaninov)
Mussorgsky The Fair at Sorochintsi – Gopak (arr Rachmaninov)
(arr Rachmaninov)
Rachmaninov Etudes-tableaux – Op 33 Nos 2 & 7; Op 39 No 6. Humoresque, Op 10 No 5. Moment musical, Op 16 No 2. Mélodie, Op 3 No 3. Oriental Sketch. Polka de VR. Preludes – Op 3 No 2; Op 23 No 10; Op 32 Nos 3, 6 & 7. Serenade, Op 3 No 5, Daisies, Op 38 No 3. Lilacs, Op 21 No 5
Rimsky-Korsakov The Tale of Tsar Saltan – Flight of the Bumble Bee (arr Rachmaninov)
Schubert Das Wandern, D795 No 1 (arr Rachmaninov)
Tchaikovsky Cradle Song, Op 16 No 1

Sergel Rachmaninov *pf*

Naxos Historical mono  8 111397 (75' • ADD)



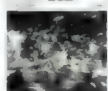
The great pianist-composer in his own and others' music

For many, Rachmaninov was the greatest of all pianists, and here in Ward Marston's magnificent transfers he is at last given his due in sound. Now we can savour and assess a bronze-like sonority that complemented a no less legendary rhythmic sharpness and an aristocratic sense of line and phrase. And on recordings dating from 1925-42 you hear playing brimming over with a bracing sentiment untouched by sentimentality. Rarely can estimates of his playing as 'disgusting' (Arrau, presumably referring to performances of music by composers other than Rachmaninov) or of music 'too cosmopolitan to be of lasting value' (an early edition of *Grove*) seemed wider of the mark. No composer or pianist has sounded more indelibly Russian, and never more so than in his own music.

What clear relish and delight in the playful rather than melancholic capers of the Polka, what vitality and aplomb in the festive E major Prelude, Op 32 No 3, what intimidating mastery in the *Moment musical* No 2 or in the *Mélopie* and *Humoresque*. What vertiginous dexterity in the Mendelssohn *Scherzo*, what a mischievous sense of anachronism in hyphenated Bach. The abridged version, too, of the Kreisler *Liebesfreud* shows Rachmaninov as the ultimate free spirit, throwing caution to the wind but never losing his iron control. And although I would never want to be without the Polka from Cherkassky, the second *Moment musical* from Lazar Berman (his early UK disc) or the Mendelssohn *Scherzo* from Moiseiwitsch, this, the third volume of Naxos's 'Great Pianists' Rachmaninov, gives us playing beyond price. **Bryce Morrison**

Schubert

Piano Sonata No 17, D850. *Moments musicaux*, D780
Valery Afanassiev *pf*
ECM New Series © 476 4580 (70' • DDD)



Valery Afanassiev returns to Schubert

You never know what to expect from Valery Afanassiev. One year it's the most lifeless Beethoven concerto cycle on disc, another year he'll give you absorbingly subjective and poetic Brahms Intermezzos. His Schubert falls between these extremes. The first of the six *Moments musicaux* contains its fair share of artificial accents alongside some beautifully muted lyrical playing. If No 2's rhetorical *tenutos* are drawn out to a fault, he still generates tension within the music's long, introspective lines. No 3 drags with the weight of the world on its shoulders and no compensating tonal heft. Afanassiev's plodding way with No 4's outer sections contrasts with the way his charmless yet straightforward shaping of the major-key middle section is one of the few to make Schubert's rhythmic displacements of phrase truly audible. While Afanassiev's tempo for No 5 largely honours the composer's *Allegro vivace* directive, some of his rhythmic articulation lapses into triplets rather than duplets. Beneath the hard-nosed surface Afanassiev presents in No 6 lies some genuinely sung-out, lilting moments: if only there were more.

Next to Clifford Curzon's tonal finesse, Richard Goode's supple wit and Artur Schnabel's surging energy, the opening *Allegro vivace* of Afanassiev's D major Sonata is relatively joyless. His clipped rendition of the *Con moto*'s main theme and its reiterations grows increasingly irritating and predictable, yet his soft playing and changes of colour to underline harmonic felicities cannot be discounted. The latter virtue redeems the

Scherzo's Trio, in contrast to the heavy-handed and choppy main section. In some ways Afanassiev's austere, matter-of-fact treatment of the Rondo undermines the music's childlike demeanour to convincing effect, albeit not to the more playful and magical degree of Goode's inflections and nuances. Perhaps Afanassiev saved most of his energy and creativity for the colourful, fantasy-ridden booklet-notes he provides for this not uninteresting yet ultimately unattractive release. **Jed Distler**

D850 – selected comparisons:

Curzon (DECC) 478 4389DB24

Goode (NONE) 7559 79271-2

Schnabel (EMI) 764259-2

Alexander Ghindin

Rachmaninov *Morceaux de fantaisie*, Op 3
Stravinsky *Three Movements from Petrushka*
Tchaikovsky *Piano Sonata*, Op 37
Alexander Ghindin *pf*

Piano Classics © PCLO044 (70' • DDD)



A Russian pianist explores his country's grand tradition

Alexander Ghindin's novel debut album (Ondine) consisted of Rachmaninov's First and Fourth Concertos partnered by Ashkenazy and given in their first florid and 'unedited' versions. A top prize-winner in this and that competition and an 'Honoured Artist of Russia', he has appeared with many celebrated orchestras and conductors. And, as his latest album declares, he is a pianist who embraces his again all-Russian programme with a powerful, highly individual eloquence.

His *Petrushka* is novel and exploratory, leaving you with a sharp sense of the original ballet, its alternating exultance and despair, rather than mere virtuoso glory. Nothing is played for obvious effect and the same could be said of his Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky. In the former's Op 3 *Morceaux de fantaisie* – a refreshing change from the now ubiquitous Second Sonata – everything is broadly and grandly inflected. There is a searing climax in the Elegy and if the Serenade is more pliant than the composer's own characteristic economy, it carries its own special authority. The Tchaikovsky Sonata, once but no longer a set work for the Tchaikovsky Competition (competitors complained about its daunting length and, for some, musical inferiority), is again played with far more flexibility than by the relatively metronomic but magnificent Richter. Yet even when you find Ghindin's *rubato* disruptive, you recall his blaze of defiance at the close of the first movement's pounding rhetoric or the way he soars to the climax of the *Andante* (where the influence of Schumann is paramount). Piano Classics' sound is admirable and this is clearly a pianist in the grandest of grand traditions. **Bryce Morrison**

GRAMOPHONE Archive

Schubert's Piano Sonata, D850

Three pianists who came before Valery Afanassiev and how Gramophone rated them



NOVEMBER 1964

Piano Sonata No 17, D850

Clifford Curzon *pf*

Decca ● SXL6135 (12in, 32s 3d)

Clifford Curzon comes close to arranging that the music should take wings, at least in the outer movements. A controlled fire illuminates the opening, which bodes well for the whole sonata, and the finale is none the less delicate for pursuing its overall course with some address. In between I am not quite sure that Curzon succeeds in disguising the fierce length of the slow movement, perhaps made to seem longer rather than shorter in this performance by being joined – oddly – to the *Scherzo*. *Scherzo*, that is, by Schubert's description, not Beethoven's definition; and here, only, I would suggest an actual tactical error on Curzon's part. He is too leisurely. This is the sole reservation; and it is a minor one. Elsewhere the beauty and control of Curzon's playing give the performance an air of mastery which will surely stand this sonata in very good stead. *Malcolm Macdonald*



JULY 1966

Piano Sonata No 17, D850

Emil Gilels *pf*

RCA Victor ● SB6667 (12in, 32s 3d)

Gilels tackles the D major Sonata in a high-spirited style that makes some of the opening *Allegro vivace* in particular sound rather breathless; and I think a sharper definition of rhythms and rhythmic patterns might have given the slow movement a firmer air of direction – as if aware of a danger Schubert marked it *con moto*, which Gilels's heavily inflected tempo sometimes isn't. There remains, I hasten to add, a good deal of searching eloquence in his reading, particularly in the Trio section of the *Scherzo* and the G major episode in the finale. This new RCA offers Schubert-playing of some distinction and often of really commanding quality. *Stephen Plaistow*



SEPTEMBER 2009

Piano Sonata No 17, D850

Imogen Cooper *pf*

Avie © (2) AV2516 (149' • DDD)

Free from the confines of the studio, Cooper rises to the occasion with performances that show ■ courageous advance on her already distinguished work. Her desire to avoid an undue or cloying romanticism sees her moving swiftly through the *Con moto* of the D major Sonata. And if there are moments in the sing-a-song-of-sixpence finale where I wish she had worn her insights more lightly, nothing is ever less than personal and engaging. Always you sense how the influences of her fellow musicians have now been subsumed into ■ vision entirely her own. *Bryce Morrison*

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Vocal



David Patrick Stearns on Luonnotar from Anu Komsi:
'Where Schwarzkopf projected elemental fierceness, Komsi finds more sustained profundity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**



Ken Smith reviews Andreas Scholl in central European Lieder:
'Scholl is less a story-teller than a weaver of spells, unleashing a fully conceived emotional state and sustaining it' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**

JS Bach

St Matthew Passion, BWV244

Wolfram Lattke *ten* Evangelist **Klaus Mertens** *bass*

Christus **Christina Landshamer** *sop* **Stefan Kahle**

counterten **Martin Lattke** *ten* **Gotthold Schwarz** *bass*

St Thomas Boys' Choir, Leipzig; Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Georg Christoph Biller

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus ② ③ ACC20256; ④ ACC10256

(164' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s). Recorded live, April 5 & 6, 2012



St Matthew Passion on DVD from Bach's church in Leipzig

A far cry from the sombre and disillusioned collaborations between the Thomaners and the Gewandhaus Orchestra in the post-war years, this recording from Maundy Thursday and Good Friday of 2012 at St Thomas's presents a relatively contented era of municipal Bach performance. Exactly how one defines musical 'tradition' in the context of Leipzig since Bach's death is a thorny subject but, judging by this latest chapter, it's now a matter of how 'period' manners and inflections dominate over the sluggish swathes heard in the *St Matthews* of Kurt Thomas and Erhard Mauresburger.

Indeed, the opening frames of the work skittle forth with clear textures, unforced choral interjections and the élan of an especially agile German all-boys' choir. Likewise, the orchestra is entirely at home in Georg Christoph Biller's exacting gestural landscape (encapsulated perfectly in 'Blute nur'), effortlessly extended from their youthful modern-instrument Baroque forays under Riccardo Chailly.

The unostentatious filming resonates with Biller's uncomplicated and, some might say, fairly unexceptional interpretation. An impressive evolution of the narrative is achieved largely by ■ judicious choice of tempi and the ringing reportage of Wolfram Lattke, a solid if not especially poetic Evangelist (and one of three soloists who are alumni of the choir). Klaus Mertens is a seasoned and eloquent Christus, the pick of the crop, but with soprano Christina Landshamer also delivering consistently well, most notably in 'Aus Liebe'. There is much else to admire in this production, in toto, with its coherent audio and



Leipzig united: the St Thomas Boys' Choir and members of the Gewandhaus Orchestra at Bach's old workplace

visual values – refreshingly un-iconic in avoiding Bach's burial place every other shot.

The least durable aspect is the shortage of penetrating musical insights and gut-wrenching human response that define the great interpretations of the last 70 years. Each listener has his moments of defining importance: 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen' near the end of Part 1 is such a place for me, where metaphysical allusions invite musicians to find ways of transporting us. This is a reading which confirms a strong identity with Bach and the new Leipzig 'way' of performing his music but keeps within fairly geometric emotional bounds. For all the new-found surface health in Leipzig collaboration, revelations of the Great Passion are thin on the ground here. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Bononcini

Messa a cinque concertata. Stabat mater

Silvia Frigato, Raffaella Milanese *sops* **Andrea**

Arrivabene *counterten* **Elena Biscuola, Sara Mingardo**

contrs **Valerio Contaldo, Raffaele Giordani** *ten* **Salvo**

Vitale *bass* **Concerto Italiano Choir and Orchestra / Rinaldo Alessandrini**

Naïve ⑤ OP30537 (80' • DDD • T/T)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, January 2012



Alessandrini uncovers Giovanni Bononcini's brother

Antonio Maria Bononcini (1677-1726) was the younger brother of the celebrated opera composer Giovanni. Both studied in Bologna, relocated to Rome and thereafter flourished in Berlin and Vienna; Giovanni became Handel's colleague in London, whereas Antonio eventually settled as the court *maestro di cappella* in Modena. His contrapuntally complex *Stabat mater* for four-part voices and strings has been recorded a few times before but never with the assured qualities of Concerto Italiano's masterful performance – although there are a few brief moments of dodgy tuning from the violins in the opening chorus (the only blatant gremlin of this live recording made at Vienna's Konzerthaus). Expressive arias such as the florid 'Eia, mater, fons amoris' are strikingly juxtaposed with diverse choral movements that range from affectionate charm ('Virgo virginum praeclara') to emotionally plaintive fugues of exemplary workmanship ('Paridisi gloria').

The unpublished five-part Mass has never been recorded before. Rinaldo Alessandrini praises its 'synthesis between ecclesiastical and

operatic styles'. Concerto Italiano's lean strings and two assertive theorbos make a telling impact throughout the Mass, and the 17-strong Choir of Concerto Italiano sing precisely and expressively (a beautiful setting of *Agnus Dei*); movements sung by single voices include a sublime 'Qui tollis' and elsewhere there are some surprising sonorities, such as an inventive low trio for two tenors and bass ('Domine Deus, Rex coelestis'). These distinguished performances reveal exactly the kind of unfairly neglected repertoire that the Early Music Revival was invented for. **David Vickers**

Elgar

'The Longed-For Light: Elgar's Music in Wartime' Carillon, Op 75^b. Carissima. Le drapeau belge, Op 79^b. Polonia, Op 76. Rosemary. The Sanguine Fan, Op 81. Sospiri, Op 70. Sursum corda, Op 11. Une voix dans le désert, Op 77^{ab}

^aSusan Gritton sop ^bSimon Callow spkr
BBC Concert Orchestra / John Wilson
Somm © SOMMCD247 (75' • DDD)



First modern recordings of Great War Elgar

Here's a supremely enjoyable Elgar survey centred around a clutch of works composed during the Great War, three of which were directly inspired by the plight of Belgium. *Carillon* (1914), *Une voix dans le désert* (1915) and *Le drapeau belge* (1916) employ patriotic texts by the exiled, then London-based Belgian poet Emile Cammaerts (1878-1953), and the first at least won considerable public acclaim. Speaker Simon Callow delivers the goods with characteristic relish; soprano Susan Gritton is a beguiling presence in the surprisingly restrained *Une voix dans le désert* (by some margin the most imaginatively wrought and subtly textured of the three settings).

Throughout, the BBC Concert Orchestra respond with bright-eyed conviction and commendable polish for John Wilson, whose endearingly communicative, shapely and affectionate readings of both the rousing *Polonia* (1915) and to my mind still underestimated one-act ballet *The Sanguine Fan* (1917) easily hold their own in the august company of Boult's fondly regarded mid-1970s EMI recordings. Wilson's treatment of *Sospiri* (1914) is particularly intoxicating, with some beautifully judged, 'old school' string *portamento* worthy of Barbirolli himself, and he also shines in the two exquisite miniatures *Carissima* (1914) and *Rosemary* (the latter a 1915 reworking of a piano piece from 1882 entitled *Douce pensée*). Only the early, organ-rich *Sursum corda* (1894) perhaps fails to improve on repetition.

Elgarians should certainly lend an ear to this enterprising and rewarding Somm anthology. First-class production values, and authoritative notes from Andrew Neill. **Andrew Achenbach**

Fauré • JS Bach

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004, and Chorales Fauré Requiem, Op 48 (1893 version)^a

^aGrace Davidson sop ^bWilliam Gaunt bar Gordan Nikolitch vn Tenebrae; London Symphony Orchestra Chamber Ensemble / Nigel Short

LSO Live LSO0728 (68' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at St Giles' Cripplegate, London, May 7, 2012



Live Fauré and Bach from LSO forces at St Giles' Cripplegate

The usual suspects to pair with Fauré's Requiem – *Cantique de Jean Racine* and *Messe Basse* – get more exposure than their musical quality justifies, so it is good to have this unique coupling on disc, even if, at first sight, there is no obvious logic behind it. Certainly prefacing the Fauré with Bach's violin Partita No 2 got everyone firmly in the D minor mood for the live concert last May, while Gordan Nikolitch's extravagantly expressive approach, oozing *rubato* out of every bar, established an atmosphere of late-19th-century romanticism. On top of that, peppering the movements of the Partita with various chorales gave the choir a good warm-up, even if superimposing these over the Chaconne, for all the academic justification in the booklet, comes across on disc as if soundproofing was a problem and the microphones accidentally picked up strains of a distant choir.

But with the unbroken segue into the Fauré, everything falls perfectly into place. Perhaps because there is a clear link between the two – psychological rather than musical – the performance is elevated into something quite remarkable; I have no hesitation in labelling this the very best Fauré Requiem on disc.

This may be the pared-down Rutter version of the Requiem but, given the grand spaciousness of the recorded sound and Nigel Short's expansive approach, it is a performance of extreme richness and opulence. Short's marvellously moulded phrases, long-drawn and exquisitely shaped, as well as his penchant for expansive *crescendos* (most potently displayed at 'Lux aeterna luceat eis'), in which James Sherlock leads the way brilliantly with some breathtaking manipulation of the St Giles' Cripplegate organ, are vital elements in elevating this performance to the sublime.

Not to be downplayed, however, is the exquisite singing of Tenebrae, the magical violin luminously hovering over the *Sanctus* like an angel in the clouds, instinctively warm and sympathetic orchestral playing and, above all, absolutely gorgeous singing – object lessons in understatement and poise – from both Grace Davidson and William Gaunt. In short, this is a devastatingly beautiful performance.

Marc Rochester

Humfrey • Purcell

'My Beloved Spake'

Humfrey Magnificat and Nunc dimittis. O Lord my God^{abd} Purcell Remember not, Lord, our offences, Z50. Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei, Z135^{bd}. O sing unto the Lord, Z44^{abd}. Behold, now praise the Lord, Z3^{abd}. My beloved spake, Z28^{abd}. Hear my prayer, O Lord, Z15. Rejoice in the Lord alway, Z49^{abd}

^aIestyn Davies counterten ^bJames Gilchrist ten

^cDavid Stout bar ^dNeal Davies bass Choir of

St John's College, Cambridge; St John's Sinfonia /

Andrew Nethsingha with John Challenger org

Chandos Chaconne CHAN0790 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Purcell and his Chapel Royal choirmaster from St John's

It is nice these days to have a chance to hear some of Purcell's church anthems sung by a choir of boys and men, a sound one imagines to be nearer to what the composer knew than the cleanly blended one we have become familiar with from adult mixed-voice choirs. There's the difference of course; the rightly renowned Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, with its 16 trebles, offers a thicker sound than would, well, The Sixteen, with less transparency, light or springy life – a shame in Purcell's richly spiced counterpoint. But there is also an authenticity to it, an honesty and relevance to Purcell and his role in the history of English church music that cannot be resisted.

This selection presents some old favourites – both of the full-anthem type and the verse-anthem kind with soloists and strings – all making a fine case for Purcell's genius, as usual. But also slotted in are two works by the man who conducted the Chapel Royal choir when Purcell was still among the trebles. Pelham Humfrey died even younger than Purcell, at 26, but his substantial and deeply penitential verse anthem *O Lord my God* suggests another talent sadly cut off. His *Mag* and *Nunc* are more functional, yet strong nevertheless.

It is in integrated works such as *O Lord my God*, where the expressive urgency of this recording's excellent soloists can rub off, that the choir is at its best; less successful are the more patchwork pieces, where the switches between solo, choir and instrumental sections often lose their organic flow; how can the repeat of the ritornello in *My beloved spake*, for instance, sound so blithely unaffected by the tenderness of the music that has just preceded it? The recording (made in the St John's Chapel) likewise seems afflicted by the difficulty of capturing all these elements in one convincing perspective, resulting in a sometimes gawky mix of the distant and the cramped. This is great music, and needs more expansiveness and wholeness than it gets here.

Lindsay Kemp

Ireland

Te Deum. Benedictus. Communion Service. My song is love unknown. Elegiac Romance. Evening Services – in C; in F. Christ the Lord is risen today (Sampford). Four Unaccompanied Carols. Greater love hath no man. I am trusting (Eastergate). Ex ore innocentium. Capriccio. Island Praise

Lincoln Cathedral Choir / Aric Prentice with

Charles Harrison *org*

Naxos © 8 573014 (77' • DDD • T)



Prentice and Harrison mark a decade at Lincoln with Ireland

Ireland's church music has a modest restraint, compared with the output of Bairstow, Howells and Parry. But his significant contribution has stood the test of time, remaining popular to this day. Jeremy Dibble's informative booklet-notes point to the influence of Stanford and one also notes an Elgarian grandeur and melodic inventiveness with a touch of modal harmony in the manner of Vaughan Williams.

Lincoln Cathedral Choir under Aric Prentice's enthusiastic direction give excellent performances, with impeccable blend and ensemble. The balance between the lower and upper voices is ideal, and the overall sound is crowned by the bright-toned trebles. There are some accomplished solo choristers and it's refreshing to hear the choir's gentlemen singing without the operatic tone heard in other cathedral choirs. Prentice favours flowing tempi, which are occasionally a little too fast, bearing in mind Ireland's metronome and tempo markings.

Charles Harrison also adopts a brisk pace in the organ solo *Capriccio* to stunning virtuoso effect. He's equally fine in the *Elegiac Romance* – a masterpiece, with its brooding, almost Mahlerian intensity. The 1898 Father Willis organ sounds magnificent, although rather subdued in the choral accompaniments. The blame for this lies with the recording, which tends to favour the choir over the organ.

Full marks to Prentice for devising such a varied programme of choral items and to Harrison for choosing Ireland's two best organ solos. A very enjoyable and rewarding disc, showcasing the fine quality of British cathedral music-making. **Christopher Nickol**

Nørgård

Libra. Réves en pleine lumière. Kredsløb (Cycle)

Adam Riis *ten* Stefan Östersjö *gtr*

Danish National Vocal Ensemble / Fredrik Malmberg

Dacpo © 6 220622 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Denmark's national pro choir sings Nørgård's 'love music'

Listening to Per Nørgård's *Libra*, you wonder how a composer could write music that at once

sounds so invitingly familiar and utterly mysterious. *Libra* basks in diatonicism; the genteel opening guitar solo could, if you stumbled in unawares, be momentarily mistaken for the backdrop strum of a Simon and Garfunkel track. And yet Nørgård's harmonic patterns have clearly been filtered through some higher intelligence. Dacapo's excellent booklet-notes explain how fractal geometry reconnected their man with tonality. But even with that information at hand, *Libra* remains a thing of wonder.

Nørgård's description 'love music for tenor solo, guitar, two choirs and two vibraphones' is apt. Modelled around the idea of a cantata and written in 1973, texts by Rudolf Steiner and from the Psalms of David are woven around a 10-movement structure that tenaciously renews its expressive juices. Stories overlap stories. Guitarist Stefan Östersjö takes Nørgård at his word as he bends his phrasing to accommodate alien chromatic smudges designed to inject the prevailing tonal pathway with awareness of other harmonic route maps: *poco rubato* given structural sting. When the choir enter with the first, unambiguously tonal psalm setting, Nørgård creates an inner tension between materials that powers the music onwards.

In the studio, Nørgård arranged his musicians with a view to keeping the vibraphones looking in from the ethereal margins; *Libra* is all about shifting perspectives on that elusive overlap between an inside and outside world, between plain-speaking harmony and harmony with its own work-it-out-for-yourself internal function. Presumably a successful performance is one that makes this dual harmonic function explicit; and between the Danish National Vocal Ensemble's immaculate enunciation and Fredrik Malmberg's sensitive decrypting of Nørgård's multiple meanings, his composition is revealed as being bold, beautiful and wise. Two *a cappella* works sign off, orbiting *Libra*'s universe like satellites of the mothership. **Philip Clark**

'Plorer, gemir, crier'

'Homage to Johannes Ockeghem'

Busnois In hydraulis Josquin La déploration

de Johannes Ockeghem Lupi Ergone conticuit

Obrecht Missa Sicut spina rosam

La Rue Plorer, gemir

Diabolus in Musica / Antoine Guerber

Aeon © AECD1226 (62' • DDD)



Ockeghem and the ripples of his Franco-Flemish influence

In a recent online round-up, I remarked that Obrecht's discography is more remarkable for quantity than consistency, especially in the domain of the Mass. All the more reason to welcome this new issue from the French ensemble Diabolus in Musica. This is an

imagined memorial for Johannes Ockeghem, with Obrecht's *Missa Sicut spina rosam* (to give it its correct name) as its centrepiece – fittingly, for it borrows liberally from the elder composer's famous *Missa My-my*. This performance is so well judged that it positively invites repeated listening. The *Credo*, which has two voices in the top range rather than one, is particularly impressive. Obrecht's ear for beguilingly full sonority is underpinned by a masterly command of musical architecture, which depends for its full effect on a fine judgement of tempo. Happily, Antoine Guerber's ensemble convincingly accounts for both. Moreover, its sound is quite distinctive; grainy, but not obtrusively so.

The Mass is framed by two chansons, Josquin's famous *Nymphes des bois* and La Rue's *Plorer, gemir*, both of which employ the Requiem plainchant. Admittedly, the notion that the latter was conceived as an Ockeghem memorial is speculative and Guerber's completion of its text is offered in the same spirit. Less successful are the two motets that conclude the programme: Busnois's celebrated, extrovert *In hydraulis* calls for an intensity that the four soloists can't quite summon, and Lupi's *Ergone conticuit* is a perfectly respectable piece but stylistically far removed from the rest. Never mind, for the Obrecht is superb.

Fabrice Fitch

Pärt

Adam's Lament. Beatus Petronius. Salve regina.

Statuit ei Dominus. Alleluja Tropus. L'Abbé Agathon.

Estonian Lullaby. Christmas Lullaby

Latvian Radio Choir; Vox Clamantis; Riga Sinfonietta;

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir; Tallinn

Chamber Orchestra / Tõnu Kaljuste

ECM New Series © 476 4825 (68' • DDD)



Pärt's vision of a common heritage in the line of Adam

Arvo Pärt's standing as one of the most important choral composers of his generation is surely confirmed on this highly impressive recording featuring the Latvian Radio Choir, Vox Clamantis and the Riga Sinfonietta.

The centrepiece is the title-track itself, *Adam's Lament*, a large-scale work for choir and string orchestra, composed in 2009 and premiered the following year in Istanbul. It sets texts by the Eastern Orthodox monk Saint Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), the strength of whose words lies in the manner in which he extends Adam's grief and suffering to humanity as a whole, evidenced in such lines as 'Adam wept because peace and love were lost to all men on account of his sin'. The magnitude of such loss is reflected in Pärt's ambitious setting. From the powerful opening gesture based on a series of plagal cadences to a foreboding final section, *Adam's Lament* encompasses a diverse



Julius Drake and Gerald Finley rehearse at the Wigmore Hall, London

and at times exhilarating range of dissonant and consonant moods.

There's a real sense of drive and momentum to Pärt's recent music, a quality that may come as a surprise to those familiar with his earlier works. Such contrasting moments of reflection and anticipation are absent from the gentle, beautiful *Beatus Petronius* and its more dramatic companion piece *Statuit ei Dominus*. It seems strange that these two pieces, composed in 1990 and arranged here for antiphonal choir, woodwinds, bells and strings, are separated on this recording by the more recent *Salve regina*. The latter's unwinding, processional quality gradually builds up impressively towards a climax on a series of Baroque-like chord progressions some two-thirds of the way through. Baroque elements also appear in the quasi-recitative sections of *L'Abbé Agathon*. Pärt's music loses something of its purity and austerity when it becomes too narrative, too rhetorical; but the *Estonian* and *Christmas Lullabies* which close this disc show a lighter side of Pärt that is often lost in the storm and stress of *Adam's Lament*. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Schumann

Liederkreis – Op 24; Op 39. Sechs Gedichte aus dem Liederbuch eines Malers, Op 36

Gerald Finley bar Julius Drake pf

Hyperion © CDA67944 (65' • DDD • T/T)



Liederkreis and a rare Reinick cycle from Finley and Drake

Now at the peak of his recording career, Gerald Finley is unsystematically jumping from Ives to Ravel to Schumann, no doubt because he can, though always at a high standard and answering only to his own vocal perimeters. This new recording shows a greater richness in Finley's voice plus an evolving intimacy in his approach to recording Lieder, one that retreats from the word-by-word vocal painting of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

From the opening moments of the Op 39 *Liederkreis*, Finley establishes a general tone for any given phrase or stanza, relying on the power of the sung word to carry the details. When a song has a multiplicity of voices, Finley differentiates them with his tone, but not greatly, since his focus is poetic meaning rather than dramatic narrative. A few songs come out in a single emotional *crescendo* that knits together the verse's sprawling imagery. As generalised as his approach might seem, it's not. Each song's overall conception – of which Julius Drake is a key part – reflects great thought as to its core emotion. Key consonants are more strongly articulated than others and vowels are elongated for expressive emphasis, but only here and there.

Though the Op 39 *Liederkreis* has no central protagonist like *Frauenliebe und -Leben*, Finley makes the cycle a journey into deception, his choice of vocal colour tapping into the manifestations of evil that lie beneath attractive surfaces, most obviously with the enchantress Lorelei in 'Waldeggespräch', the danger behind the dusk in 'Zwielicht' and the terror behind

public merriment in 'Im Walde'. Of course, that concept is significantly interrupted by the ecstatic 'Mondnacht'. Still, Finley's approach overall is more deeply insinuating than many.

The rest of the disc is just as beautifully sung – but why record an incredibly minor work such as the Op 36 Reinick cycle? And though Finley's Op 24 is as articulate and as well sung as any, his soft-grained approach offers no counterbalance to the composer's subdued respect for the power of the poem. Might Finley be more systematic than he now seems – and is he planning to record Schumann comprehensively? **David Patrick Stearns**

Anu Komsi

'Coloratura'

Alblev The Nightingale **Delibes** Lakmé – Bell Song **Gilèrè** Concerto for Coloratura Soprano and Orchestra, Op 82 **Mozart** Die Zauberflöte – Der Hölle Rache **A Thomas** Hamlet – Scène et air d'Ophélie **Sibelius** Luonnotar, Op 70 **Zorn** La machine de l'être

Anu Komsi sop Lahti SO / Sakari Oramo

BIS © BIS-SACD1962 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Songs and tone-poems from Finland's 'coloratura assoluta'

Are coloratura soprano showcases ever supposed to be this provocative? With her solid technique, mid-weight chest voice, small but spot-on high notes and strong sense of what those virtuosic vocal leaps might be trying to say, Anu Komsi initially seems to be giving a



Magnificat records at St George's, Chesterton, chosen for its proportional similarity to Byrd's Waltham Abbey

business-as-usual recital with the *Hamlet*, *Lakmé* and *Zauberflöte* selections: ■ mad scene here, a wronged woman there, a flashy Russian folksong (Alabiev's 'Solovey'). With the ingratiating novelty of Glière's Coloratura Soprano Concerto, Komsí and her conductor husband are unmistakably treading the same path as Sutherland and Bonyngé.

Then Komsí vanquishes Sutherland's shade with John Zorn's 2011 opera/song-cycle *La machine de l'être* that has no text or stage directions, only vocalises inspired by an Antonin Artaud drawing created in a mental asylum during his last days in 1948. Komsí has made the piece her specialty since, unlike much Zorn, the piece's instrumentation allows it to be slotted into conventional programmes.

Placing Glière and Zorn on the same disc is a brilliant stroke of programming. Komsí is at her inventive best in creating subtexts to the wordless vocal lines, suggesting a sunny lifetime of experience in Glière, though not sharing Sutherland's delight in the second movement's duet with flute, a *Lucia di Lammermoor* allusion that, truth be told, is a bit twee. Zorn's *Machine of the Being* (as the title is vaguely translated) is ■ tortured counterpart to Glière as well as an update of Thomas's Ophelia with its atonal, percussion- and wind-dominated sonorities and coloratura passagework that turns into demonic laughter and screaming. Komsí's artistry comes

together fully in Sibelius's *Luonnotar*: where Elisabeth Schwarzkopf projected elemental fierceness in Sibelius's tone-poem, Komsí finds more nuanced profundity, not just in the words but by colouring and shaping vocal lines as vividly as in Glière and Zorn. Oramo inevitably has less of the glory but much of the disc's success is due to his equal commitment to making this repertoire say all that it can.

David Patrick Stearns

'O poore distracted world!'

'English Songs and Anthems'

Blow I said in the cutting off of my days **Coprarío** Funeral Teares - O poore distracted world **Croft** Rejoice in the Lord **Locke** The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble **Lupo** O Lord come pity my complaint **Milton** If that a sinner's sighs **Peerson** O let me at thy footstool fall **Purcell** I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Z20. Let mine eyes run down with tears, Z24. Saul and the Witch of Endor, 'In guilty night', Z134 **Ramsey** In guilty night **Weelkes** O happy he whom thou protect'st **Les Voix Baroques** / **Alexander Weimann** ATMA Classique © ACD2 2630 (72' • DDD • T)



Sacred consort works from England taped in Canada

This exploration of mostly 17th-century English sacred music understandably gives

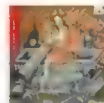
pride of place to Purcell and his mentors Locke and Blow but Les Voix Baroques also present melancholic works by composers who flourished more than half a century earlier, before the Civil War and Interregnum disturbed musical life. The use of single voices takes on the atmosphere of refined domestic devotional music, ideal for *In guilty night* by Robert Ramsey; this dialogue for the cursed Saul, the Witch of Endor and the ghost of the prophet Samuel hints at English emulation of Monteverdi madrigals and Les Voix Baroques also excel in Purcell's more famous setting that offers greater dramatic intensity.

The desire for early 17th-century English musicians to emulate Italians went amusingly further in the case of John Cooper, who called himself Coprarío (or Coperario); the album's title is taken from his elegiac *Funeral Teares*. I admired the intimately balanced five-part singing in Martin Peerson's *O let me at thy footstool fall* and the penitential *If that a sinner's sighs* by John Milton. The singing and playing are unfailingly expert in a streamlined performance of William Croft's Chapel Royal anthem *Rejoice in the Lord* (1720), which provides the missing link between Handel's English church music and Purcell.

David Vickers

'Passion & Resurrection'

Byrd In resurrectione tua **Cornysh** Woefully arrayed **Crecquillon** Congratulamini mihi **Gibbons** Hosanna to the son of David. I am the Ressurrection **Guerrero** María Magdalene **Lasso** In monte Oliveri **Lhéritier** Surrexit pastor bonus **McCabe** Woefully arrayed **Morales** O Crux, ave **Tallis** O sacrum convivium **Taverner** Dum transisset **Victoria** O vos omnes **Stile Antico** Harmonia Mundi © HMU80 7555 (71' • DDD/DS • T/t)



The conductorless group sing Passiontide motets

Stile Antico have continued a tradition established by the Tallis Scholars and The Sixteen, though with a bigger sound than either. Their recordings are frequently themed, this being a Passiontide programme consisting of motets spanning the breadth of the 16th century. The earliest piece is from the Englishman William Cornysh, whose vividly detailed *Woefully arrayed* opens the programme. The rest of the recital closely follows the Passion story, beginning with Christ's enthusiastic reception into Jerusalem (Gibbons's *Hosanna to the Son of David*), followed by the Last Supper (Tallis), the episode on the Mount of Olives (Lassus) and so on till the Resurrection. At the mid-point, however, is John McCabe's retelling of the

text set by Cornysh, specially composed for Stile Antico.

Undoubtedly this is clever programming but the narrative that underpins it doesn't necessarily guarantee a coherent recital; whether it does so here is a moot point. Stile Antico are probably at their best when the music invites them to sing out. The preference for a choral over a chamber music sound is clearly deliberate (as is the slow tempo adopted for the more solemn English pieces). None the less, solo voices might have suited some pieces (notably the Cornysh) and provided welcome contrast. The real outlier here is McCabe, whose 'Three Choirs' rhetoric isn't really disguised by Stile Antico's comparatively straight delivery. **Fabrice Fitch**

'Wanderer'

Brahms 49 Deutsche Volkslieder, WoO33 - No 6, Da unten im Tale; No 21, Es ging ein Maidlein zarte; No 25, Mein Mädlein hat einen Rosenmund; No 30, All' mein Gedanken; No 42, In stiller Nacht, zur ersten Wacht. Intermezzo, Op 118 No 2
Haydn Despair, HobXXVla/28. Recollection, HobXXVla/26. The Wanderer, HobXXVla/32
Mozart Abendempfindung, K523. Das Veilchen, K476
Schubert Abendstern, D806. An Mignon, D161. Ave Maria, D839. Du bist die Ruh', D776. Im Haine, D738. Der Jüngling auf dem Hügel, D702. Der Tod und das Mädchen, D531. Waltz, D145 No 6

^a**Andreas Scholl** *countertenor* **Tamar Halperin** *pf*
Decca © 478 4696DH (67 • DDD • T/T)



Scholl off a countertenor's beaten path in Germanic song

Recital audiences are often confronted with singers performing texts originally written for different genders and voice types, so this recording is not without precedent. Still, hearing a countertenor sing anything written between the years of 1700 and 1900 – to say nothing of voice type transcending gender – takes a moment of aural recalibration.

Scholl brings the same commitment to the Classical and Romantic repertoire as he does to Purcell and Dowland. His priorities, as he states on the packaging, are 'simplicity and sincerity,' which describes not merely these individual performances but also the structure of the programme. Transitions from Brahms to Haydn, or Mozart to Schubert, are not as sudden as they might seem. Classicists are captured at their most romantic, romantics at their most classical. The core of each selection is a commitment to the German folksong tradition that neither Scholl nor pianist Tamar Halperin forsakes.

As a recitalist, Scholl is less a story-teller than a weaver of spells, unleashing a fully conceived emotional state and sustaining it. The measure of his success is that he makes

Brahms's brooding folksongs and Mozart's charming *Das Veilchen* seem complete unto themselves, yet wholly interrelated.

My one complaint is that the recording level so clearly favours the voice. Particularly with the romantics, I kept longing to hear a bit more piano. Fortunately, in periodic non-vocal interludes, Halperin has the microphone all to herself.

Ken Smith

'Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang'

'Latin Music from Tudor England'

Byrd *Christe qui lux est et dies*. *De Lamentatione*. *Domine, quis habitat*. *Quomodo cantabimus*
Parsons *Ave Maria*. *Domine, quis habitat* **White** *Christe qui lux est et dies* (IV). *Lamentations* a 5
Magnificat / **Philip Cave**

Linn © CKD417 (76 • DDD/DSD)



Cave's ensemble sings
Elizabethan polyphony

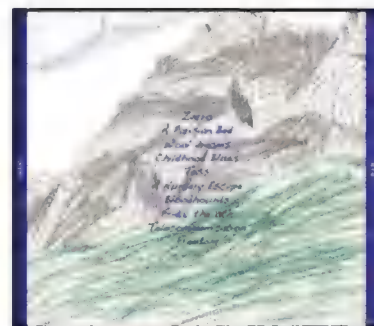
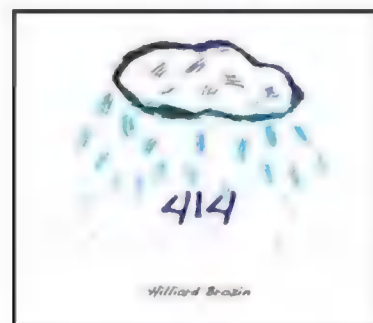
An Oxford institution for over 20 years (with a personnel list that ebbs and flows with the best singers of this repertoire), Magnificat has long represented what is great about the music created there. There is such precision and care paid to the progress of the music and its phrases that you can almost see Philip Cave placing each note carefully, exactly where he wants it. That's not to say Magnificat's sound is in any way bland in its meticulousness – far from it. The blend and ensemble of the voices is beyond reproach, despite there being enough space between each voice part to be able to hear the polyphonic lines as living entities in their own right as well as constituent parts of a bigger harmony, and Cave is enormously skilled in bringing out tiny corners of interest without overstating them and upsetting the development of the music.

This is an undeniably scholarly disc, produced as it was by the grand dame of working choral editions of early church music, Sally Dunkley. The thesis that runs through the disc states that the early years of Elizabeth I's reign, during which all these pieces were written, were ones of exponentially rapid change in the identity of the polyphony of Latin-based texts from conservative to freely composed imitative music. With the exception of Byrd's *Quomodo cantabimus*, it is a programme of frequently performed works; and although it may have been more 'worthy' to populate such a disc with obscurer music, to match the depth of Dunkley's scholarly commitment to this music, it is nevertheless enormously gratifying to have the opportunity to listen with impunity to such nonpareils of the Tudor period sung so beautifully.

Caroline Gill

Hilliard Brozin

South African Cape Town
composer Hilliard Brozin has
released his first solo album
entitled '414'.



Currently signed to Sony Music Publishing and having been on an EMI compilation with Vangelis, Sarah Brightman, Ennio Morricone and Mike Oldfield his own album is now available worldwide.

Hilliard's music has also been aired on Classic FM.

Classic Feel magazine in their review of his debut album '414' said - "*His brand of New Age/Classical fusion has been likened to the work of Philip Glass, Ennio Morricone and Eric Serra. The music takes the form of meditative, often ethereal backdrops but it not without a touch of drama.*"

Also featured on Canadian compilation "Drifting Deep".

His debut album '414' is now available on iTunes, Amazon, cdbaby.com and many other music retailers.

Opera



Richard Fairman on Isokoski's return to orchestral Strauss:

'She is highly sensitive, nicely set off against the flickering detail of the luminous orchestral accompaniment' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



Mike Ashman on Robert Lepage's Ring on DVD from the Met:

'The result is a boring, conventional narrative stage production with some undoubted musical highs' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**

Bizet

Carmen

Anne Sofie von Otter *mez* **Carmen**
Marcus Haddock *ten* **Don José**
Lisa Milne *sop* **Micaëla**
Laurent Naouri *bar* **Escamillo**
Mary Hegarty *sop* **Frasquita**
Christine Rice *mez* **Mercédès**
Quentin Hayes *bar* **Dancaire**
Colin Judson *ten* **Remendado**
Hans Vorschezang *bar* **Morales**
Jonathan Best *bass-bar* **Zuniga**

Glyndebourne Chorus; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Glyndebourne ④ ③ GFOCD016-02 (3h) • DDD • S/T/t
 Recorded live, July & August 2002



Von Otter's 2002 Carmen in Glyndebourne's own sound

Glyndebourne's summer 2002 *Carmen* was memorable for bringing Swedish mezzo Anne Sofie von Otter away from her habitual Oktavians and other Monteverdi and Handel trouser roles into boisterous, feminine acting with rather different vocal demands. This 'soundtrack', cleanly recorded by the house's famous on-the-spot man John Barnes, appears a decade after a BBC TV transmission (and later an Opus Arte DVD – 4/03) were made available.

The release allows the listener to focus on the way that von Otter vocalised a part that may not have been thought a natural fit, especially on her selection of vocal colours and taste in what one may call 'roughing up' the voice to achieve credibility as the Andalusian gypsy. Her achievement also can be heard in her use of the top of the voice (as bell-like clean as many soprano interpreters), attention to dynamics and use of time and colour in the recitatives (not to mention when speaking). She also works closely with Swiss conductor Philippe Jordan (his UK debut), a maestro already attentive to the ebb and flow of sung drama.

The ladies also have it in the remainder of the casting. Mary Hegarty and Christine Rice are as sparky and accurate a gypsy pair as you'll find since Solti's Norma Burrowes and Jane Berbié (Decca, 9/85), while Lisa Milne's Micaëla is an ideal mixture of youth and (for

the Act 3 aria, which often decides casting choice) vocal weight. The *comprimarii* men are not short of British character (Hayes, Judson, Best). Haddock's José packs quite a vocal punch – and loves his top notes – but both he and Naouri's Escamillo (vocally on the 'comique' side but a fearless negotiator of his Act 2 aria's unsingable tessitura) sound like they're indulging themselves in a way that their sisters here don't, and neither is a great judge of time in the many recitative-like passages.

Top-class chorus work (Tecwyn Evans), the beauty and sheer musicality of von Otter's singing (while never lacking bite), the women and Jordan's instinctive-sounding pacing of a very full edition make this new/old *Carmen* one of the serious choices in a crowded field where an ensemble accustomed to each other will always have the edge over drop-in star casting in the studio. **Mike Ashman**

Debussy

Pelléas et Mélisande

Camille Maurane *bar* **Pelléas**
Suzanne Danco *sop* **Mélisande**
Henri-Bertrand Etcheverry *bass-bar* **Golaud**
André Vessières *bass* **Arkel**
Oda Solbodskaya *sop* **Geneviève**
Marjorie Westbury *sng* **Yniold**
Ernest Frank *bass* **Doctor/Shepherd**
BBC Chorus; Philharmonia Orchestra /
Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht

Testament mono ④ ③ SBT3 1484 (165' • ADD)
 Broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, June 1, 1951



Ingelbrecht's BBC-broadcast Pelléas now on Testament

Half-English and a colleague and friend of Debussy's (a published correspondence exists), Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht sculpts a rich, weighty but microscopically balanced reading of the composer's only completed opera. It's quite a shock to ears brought up on the sound worlds of lighter, supposedly more 'modern' interpreters such as Roger Désormière – EMI's choice to lead the iconic wartime (and first-ever) complete *Pelléas* recording – or his disciple Pierre Boulez (Sony). Whereas these latter interpreters have Debussy only a short step away from the music of Boulez himself

and Dutilleux that followed, Ingelbrecht's realisation of the score looks further back, with clear fingerprints of the *Parsifal* that Debussy so admired, and even of the lushness of successful operatic contemporaries of his childhood like Gounod and Massenet. If you're used to Act 5 (Mélisande's death) as a kind of quiet minimalist afterthought, the passion evoked here by Arkel and the orchestra will refocus your attention. Wagner listeners of a certain age may compare the effect to that time in the 1970s when performances by Reginald Goodall and live tapes of Hans Knappertsbusch surprised and delighted those used to the slimmer dynamic range and brisker gait of the available studio recordings from Karajan and Solti.

A combination of lucky accidents brought this new reissue's performers together for a June 1951 BBC studio recording that had been mooted originally with Ernest Ansermet, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Maggie Teyte (Debussy's own second Mélisande) as Geneviève. Corresponding very precisely via his (third) wife and securing exactly what he wanted in terms of intervals (one) and no cuts, Ingelbrecht transformed Walter Legge's young Philharmonia in little time into a virtuoso version of a French theatre orchestra, evidently enjoying his work with the orchestra's star wind players. His Franco-Belgian-Russian cast had much experience in this work: Etcheverry had already recorded his Golaud for Désormière, Maurane was the other great Pelléas of the day next to EMI's Jacques Jansen (and would re-record the role for Jean Fournet and Ansermet) and Vessières was a unique lyric bass, able to make Arkel passionate, neither bore nor grouse. Testament's notes have reservations about the English actress/singer Marjorie Westbury as Yniold but the maestro thought enough of her perky drama to import it into his next Paris broadcast.

Ingelbrecht *Pelléas* have circulated before (notably Disques Montaigne's 1962 performance with Vessières, Jansen and Micheline Grancher – Naïve, 8/88⁸) but none has been presented in sound as true as this one. It's an important contribution to our perception of Debussy's opera and one to take a place alongside Désormière, both Boulezes (the DG



Brenda Rae wields her scimitar as Armida in Robert Carsen's production of *Rinaldo* for the 2011 Glyndebourne Festival (see page 78)

Welsh National Opera DVD as well as the Sony Covent Garden set) and the Karajan (EMI, which I've come to love and is closer to Ingelbrecht's sonorities than these French moderns). **Mike Ashman**

Selected comparisons:

Désormière (8/88⁹) (EMI) 345770-2

Boulez (4/92⁸) (SONY) 88697 52722-2

Karajan (1/99⁸) (EMI) 966723-2

Boulez (2/03) (DG) 073 030-9GH2

Handel

'Finest Arias for Base Voice'

Agrippina - Vieni, o cara. **Muzio Scevola** - Volate più dei venti. **Orlando** - Impari ognun da Orlando... Sorge infausta una procella. **Riccardo Primo** - Nel mondo e nell'abisso. **Rinaldo** - Sibilare gli angui d'Aletto. **Acis, Galatea e Polifemo** - Fra l'ombra e gl'orrori. **Acis and Galatea** - I rage, I melt, I burn!...O ruddier than the cherry. **Alexander's Feast** - Revenge, Timotheus cries. **L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato** - If I give thee honour due...Mirth, admit me of thy crew. **Apollo e Dafne** - Mie piante correte...Cara pianta. **Belshazzar** - To pow're immortal my first thanks are due. **Deborah** - Tears, such as tender fathers shed. **La Resurrezione** - Qual'insolita luce...Caddi, è ver. Semele - Leave me, loathsome light. **Theodora** - Racks, gibbets, sword and fire. **Christopher Purves** bass **Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen** Hyperion © CDA67842 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Purves joins Cohen's new group for wide-ranging Handel

Basses in the 18th century rarely enjoyed star billing. Public adulation, with fees to match, was usually reserved for temperamental sopranos and castratos. One of Handel's basses, Gustavus Waltz, may even have served a spell as the composer's cook. Yet, as this enterprising recital reveals, Handel wrote superb, varied music for several remarkable basses over his 50-year career, from the Neapolitan priest Antonio Manna, probable creator of *Polifemo* in the Italian serenata *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, to the anglicised German Henry Reinhold, his oratorio bass of choice from the late 1730s. In between, during his hectic years as opera composer-cum-director, Handel engaged two celebrated Italians: Giuseppe Maria Boschi, a baritone rather than bass who specialised in raging tyrants, and Antonio Montagnana, praised by the music historian Charles Burney for his 'depth, power and mellowness, and peculiar accuracy of intonation in hitting distant intervals'.

No Handel aria trades in 'distant intervals' more spectacularly than *Polifemo*'s 'Fra l'ombra e gl'orrori', in which the oversexed cyclops compares himself to, of all things, a bemused butterfly. Handel later recycled this,

in a slightly simplified version, for Montagnana in *Sosarme*. Unfazed, Christopher Purves sings the original, stunningly, expanding its two-and-a-half octave compass (high tenor A to subterranean bass D) by inserting a fathomless low B flat in the *da capo*. But the result is no mere circus trick. Possessing in effect two voices in one – a ringing, incisive high baritone with a sonorous bass extension – Purves veils his tone to convey bemusement, even pathos.

Purves's flair for specific characterisation enlivens every number on the disc. Egged on by Arcangelo's splenetic strings, he works himself into a rage worthy of Boschi in an aria from *Riccardo Primo*. Coloratura, here and elsewhere, is always precisely focused, wide leaps cleanly negotiated at speed. In 'O ruddier than the cherry' he delightfully suggests destructive lust barely contained beneath the would-be ingratiating veneer. Elsewhere Purves relishes the tortuous chromaticism of Lucifer's 'Caddi, è ver' (*La Resurrezione*) and the genial swing of the 'hunting' aria from *L'Allegro*, abetted by Roger Montgomery's rollicking horn obbligato. He can be dulcet, too, whether in Claudius's attempted seduction of Poppea in *Agrippina* or the arias for two chastened fathers, Abinoam (*Deborah*) and Gobrias (*Belshazzar*), the latter growing more intense and troubled as it proceeds. Trumpet and voice vie thrillingly in the perennial bass favourite, 'Revenge,

Timotheus cries', while in the final number, Somnus's 'Leave me, loathsome light', Purves evokes drowsiness and lassitude without recourse to a white, 'yawned' tone. Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo savour the rich string textures here, typical of their feeling for colour throughout a recital that pays eloquent tribute to Handel's boundless invention in composing for bass voice: a counter, as David Vickers suggests in his informative note, to the clichéd notion that his bass arias are all undifferentiated bluster. **Richard Wigmore**

Handel

Rinaldo

Sonia Prina *contr.* **Rinaldo**
Anett Fritsch *sop.* **Almirena**
Varduhi Abrahamyan *mez.* **Goffredo**
Tim Mead *counterten.* **Eustazio**
Brenda Rae *sop.* **Armida**
Luca Pisaroni *bass-bar.* **Argante**
William Towers *counterten.* **Christian Magician**
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment /
Ottavio Dantone

Stage director **Robert Carsen**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Opus Arte (DVD) OA1081D; (Blu-ray) OABD7107D
 (3h 10' + 24' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)
 Recorded live at Glyndebourne, August 2011



Carsen's 'St Trinians' Rinaldo at Glyndebourne in 2011

Handel's first London opera caused a sensation on its premiere in 1711, as much for its spectacular scenic effects as its music, much of it culled from earlier works. The plot – a sub-Ariosto mishmash of love, sorcery and Christian triumphalism set during the Crusades – is far-fetched and creaky, even by Baroque standards. But for all its dramatic absurdities, *Rinaldo* contains a string of show-stoppers, most famously Almirena's ravishing sarabande 'Lascia ch'io pianga' and Rinaldo's lament 'Cara sposa', dubbed by the 18th-century music historian Charles Burney 'the most pathetic song, and with the richest accompaniment, which had been then heard in England'.

With its ludicrous plot and, to modern audiences, highly sensitive subject, *Rinaldo* virtually demands a radical makeover. For the Glyndebourne production to mark the opera's tercentenary, Robert Carsen treated it as a schoolboy fantasy, with shades of Hogwarts and St Trinian's. Rinaldo is a Harry Potter figure, a bullied outsider who dreams of heroism, fantasises about his teachers and keeps a photo of Almirena on his desk. The Christian knight Eustazio is a well-scrubbed school prefect, while the sorceress Armida – the opera's plum role – morphs from teacher in gown and mortar board to rubber-clad dominatrix. In the final 'coro' the fantasy fades, leaving a bemused Rinaldo alone in the schoolroom. Critical

reactions to Carsen's staging ranged from euphoria to outrage. But while such a *Konzept*, playing *Rinaldo* as ironic farce, would traduce many of Handel's later operas, on its own zanily irreverent terms it's inventive and entertaining. There are some good visual gags – the explosions in the school chemistry lab, Rinaldo's magic flying bicycle, the hilarious final battle-as-football-match. The cast throw themselves into their roles with skill and verve.

Contralto Sonia Prina sings colourfully, if not always with perfect control, and sensitively negotiates the production's shifts between Rinaldo the timid, bewildered adolescent and Rinaldo the macho hero. As a pigtailed bespectacled Almirena, soprano Anett Fritsch is true and touching both in her birdsong aria with sopranino recorders (where the libretto's 'place of delight, with fountains, paths and an aviary' becomes the school bike compound) and in 'Lascia ch'io pianga'. The rich-toned if verbally rather vague mezzo Varduhi Abrahamyan and the firm, unhooty countertenor of Tim Mead make their mark as the Christian knights. But, as so often in *Rinaldo*, it is the sorceress and her lover, the Saracen king Argante, who steal the show. Oozing malign sexuality, the vocally fiery Brenda Rae becomes a movingly vulnerable, crumpled figure in her anguished aria after she has been rejected by Rinaldo. Bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni, a born stage animal, not only sings with oaken sonority and formidable agility as Argante but also makes the king more sympathetic, less of a malevolent grotesque, than usual.

If you suspect that Carsen's wacky take on Handel's heroic magic opera is for you, be assured that the OAE play with style and élan under Ottavio Dantone's energising direction. Filming is effective, though the orchestra can suffer slightly in the balance. The extras, too, are worth having, with thoughtful, unclipped comments from producer, conductor and leading members of the cast.

Richard Wigmore

Ligeti

Le Grand Macabre

Barbara Hannigan *sop.* **Venus/Gepopo**
Ana Puche *sop.* **Amanda**
Inés Moraleda *mez.* **Amando**
Brian Asawa *counterten.* **Prince Go-Go**
Ning Liang *mez.* **Mescalina**
Chris Merritt *ten.* **Piet the Pot**
Werner Van Mechelen *bar.* **Nekrotzar**
Frode Olsen *bass.* **Astradamors**
Francisco Vas *spkr.* **White Minister**
Simon Butteriss *spkr.* **Black Minister**
Chorus and Symphony Orchestra of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona / Michael Boder

Stage director **Àlex Ollé (La Fura dels Baus)**
 In collaboration with **Valentina Carrasco**
 Video director **Xavi Bové**

ArtHaus Musik (DVD) 101 643; (Blu-ray) 108 058
 (122' + 42' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live, November 2011



The London-Brussels-Rome Macabre here from Barcelona

Originally projected to be an *Oedipus* with libretto by Göran Gentele, György Ligeti's 1974-77 commission for the Stockholm Royal Opera became a version of Michel de Ghelderode's (deadly serious) 1934 farce *La balade du Grand Macabre* about the state of mankind – and, without a doubt, musically one of the great operas of the 20th century. It is not just the running thread of the synthetic Baroque love music of Amando and Amanda (originally, and better, named Clitoria and Spermando) that makes the score sound like a brilliantly wacky collision of Monteverdi and 1970s New York street music.

Performed here, as is now regular, in the composer's substantial 1996 revision, this Barcelona production by the Catalan theatre collective La Fura dels Baus was seen at English National Opera in autumn 2009 and has also visited Brussels and Rome. For the sake of the work, I am glad it was a success – but it is revealing that it pleased conservative critics who then took out what spleen they had about the drama's scatology and comedy on Ligeti and his co-librettist Michael Menschke rather than on Àlex Ollé and Valentina Carrasco's reinventing-the-wheel style of production.

Because, frankly, all the subtlety, darkness and danger of the opera is swamped beneath La Fura's now habitual parade of large statues, projections and relentless forestage street-theatre acrobatics. If the work had been staged in the 1950s there would have been a large standing set unrelated to what the actors did. Here there is a large standing fibreglass woman. The cast does actually climb in, over and out of it (using, of course, her more sexual parts) and the statue moves, but it has little to do with the drama of the piece or the production.

An international cast, chosen with the Liceu's normal skill, sing well and act to perfection the broad, superficial style that the directors require. Michael Boder and his orchestra seem to have the piece well sorted out. But there's too little feel in the production of an ensemble working together or of serious character investigation. A disappointment.

Mike Ashman

Mascagni

Cavalleria rusticana

Leonie Rysanek *sop.* **Santuzza**
Plácido Domingo *ten.* **Turiddu**
Benito di Bella *bar.* **Alfio**
Ruth Falcon *sop.* **Lola**
Astrid Varnay *sop.* **Mamma Lucia**

Leoncavallo

Pagliacci

Plácido Domingo *ten*.....Canio
 Teresa Stratas *sop*.....Nedda
 Benito di Bella *bar*.....Tonio
 Wolfgang Brendel *bar*.....Silvio
 Norbert Orth *ten*.....Beppe

Chorus of the Bavarian State Opera; Bavarian State Orchestra / Nello Santi

Orfeo (M) © C845 1221 (146' • ADD)

Recorded live, December 25, 1978



Orfeo issues Munich's Christmas Cav & Pag

We know European theatre traditions – and the first opera here does play at Easter (which Santuzza curses) – but the violence of *Cav* and *Pag* are not my idea of a Christmas Day outing. Still...here is Domingo's first-ever Turiddu/Canio double, live for Munich masochists in 1978, only relatively well recorded (Bavarian Radio) and transferred by Orfeo.

Now, I don't want to spoil the party immediately but I never understand why – apart, presumably, for financial reasons – obvious performance errors in these so-called 'first' releases of historic material are not corrected. Both Santuzza and Alfio here have unhappy moments at traditionally sticky places early on in the show which do not make for pleasant repetition. *Pagliacci* could also have done with a bit of editing – not because of performance error but in order to calm down the excessive laughter (not to mention the wordless interpolations of di Bella's over-the-top Tonio) which, heard repeatedly 'live' on disc without the benefit of pictures, is both incomprehensible and annoying.

We are left with an exciting *Cavalleria*. This is surely Domingo's more convincing part of the two. Varnay's veteran Lucia is riveting and Rysanek, once past the Easter Hymn, contributes mightily to the central quarrel duet. Di Bella is excessive and inaccurate; Maestro Santi, perhaps distracted by a stage production which an uncommonly interesting note tells us that he didn't like, is pacy but not always together with the stage. In *Pag*, Stratas, predictably, is sensational – she is the drama. Domingo is never less than solidly there vocally but tends to over-sentimentalise. Di Bella delivers 'Si può?' beautifully in concert style but then 'acts' so much in funny voices – even in his attempt to pick up Nedda – that more becomes less. Brendel is a simple, noble Silvio with good Italian. Santi accompanies straightforwardly but gives little colour to the play. The noises of the onstage audience (and Tonio) during the play – and their prominent balance – are distracting rather than exciting. The *Cavalleria* has been pirated frequently and is on YouTube.

A disappointing release for the reasons stated



Cooking up a storm: Christopher Maltman as Kasper Holten's Juan

above, although performance collectors will need Stratas, Varnay and Domingo's double.

Mike Ashman

Mozart

Don Giovanni (Juan)

A film by Kasper Holten

Christopher Maltman *bar*.....Giovanni ('Juan')
 Maria Bengtsson *sop*.....Donna Anna
 Elizabeth Futral *sop*.....Donna Elvira
 Katija Dragojevic *mez*.....Zerlina
 Peter Lodahl *ten*.....Don Ottavio
 Mikhail Petrenko *bass*.....Leporello
 Ludwig Bengtson Lindström *bar*.....Masetto
 Eric Halfvarson *bass*.....Commendatore

Concerto Copenhagen / Lars Ulrik Mortensen

Axiom Films (D) DVD AXM644 (102' • NTSC • 16:9 •

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 2 • s)

Special features: Interviews with Holten and Maltman;

Stills Gallery; Trailers



Kasper Holten's sung-on-set Don Giovanni adaptation

Unlike Joseph Losey's famous (but seriously overrated) 1979 film (Second Sight, 4/08), this is not a 'straight' screen adaptation of a complete *Don Giovanni*, rather an interpreted version based on just over half the opera, following Mozart and da Ponte's musical and dramatic narrative more or less in order. As I want to recommend this release, I will not give away too many details. Suffice it to say that we are in a modern city (Budapest was used). Giovanni is 'Juan', a famous artist whose life work is capturing images of womanhood, the Commendatore is the city's police chief and Leporello is more sidekick than servant, although he 'works' for Juan.

Although traditionalists and scholars might not agree, it's really irrelevant to talk about the musical version here but, for the record, most of the ensembles and much of the recitative are not used, some spoken remarks have been

interpolated and the language used is English. A very free English (although the libretto's characters are maintained) which feels like it may have been improvised in rehearsal and, in the case of Petrenko's Leporello, is intentionally (and amusingly) a kind of Russian pidgin-speak. Da Ponte would surely have laughed along with Zerlina's reference (in 'Giovinetti') to men undoing bra straps and Leporello's version of 'O statua gentilissima' as 'O glossy framed facsimile / of dead police commander'.

The well-chosen cast, led by Maltman's assured, sexy Juan, truly look and sound great. We are told that the singing was done live on location – and maybe it was! Despite (or because of) the modern setting and the little character rationalisations mentioned above, *Juan* has much to say about the psychology of *Don Giovanni*. But perhaps the ultimate achievement of the Royal Opera House's Kasper Holten in his first feature film (co-scripted with noted Danish writer Mogens Rukov) is to make an 'opera film' that really doesn't look like singers standing around a street in costume wondering why they're not in a theatre. Even if you're phobic about 'modern' productions, give this a go.

Mike Ashman

Puccini

Suor Angelica

Kristine Opolais *sop*.....Suor Angelica
 Lioba Braun *mez*.....Princess
 Beate Koepp *contr*.....Abbess
 Beata Borchert *contr*.....Mistress of the Novices
 Mojca Erdmann *sop*.....Sister Genovieffa
 Christiane Rost *sop*.....Sister Osmina
 Carola Günther *mez*.....Sister Dolcina
 Claudia Nüsse *mez*.....Nursing (Infirmary) Sister
 Children's Chorus of Bonn Theatre; WDR Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Andris Nelsons

Orfeo (D) C848 121A (51' • DDD)



Jeremy White's Sacristan, on the cusp of Act 1's climax during the Royal Opera's *Tosca*



Husband and wife team up for Puccini's convent tragedy

Separate recordings of *Suor Angelica* outside the trilogy of *Il trittico* are few and far between. Generally regarded as the least popular of the three operas, it turns up when a star soprano wants to record the title-role, as Joan Sutherland did under Richard Bonyngne in 1978. Coincidentally, this new recording from Orfeo also features a husband-and-wife team in the Latvian duo of Kristīne Opolais and Andris Nelsons. They gave concert performances of the opera in Cologne in May 2011 but the recording dates – six days that month, plus further sessions in October – leave it unclear whether this disc is taken from the live concerts or not.

Either way, the performance sounds fully involved. Opolais's singing immediately brings into the mind's eye a vulnerable young woman in the way that Sutherland in her fifties could not. Her bright soprano, with its surface sparkle, vividly portrays the intense feelings of Sister Angelica, a sharp edge sometimes coming to the fore when the character is under pressure. Lioba Braun has the right dark, forceful mezzo for the Princess, though it is good to be reminded how subtly

Christa Ludwig built the tension of the scene for Bonyngne. The other nuns are well taken, with Mojca Erdmann an affecting Sister Genovieffa, albeit rather similar in tone to Opolais. Nelsons paces the opera fluidly and the orchestral balance is close, making Puccini's colours come over strongly. It would have been good to have some native Italian singers among the cast but otherwise this is a clear recommendation if a single disc is wanted. Of course, for a larger outlay you can have all three operas of *Il trittico* in Opus Arte's live DVD set from Covent Garden, where there is a staging of *Suor Angelica* that will bring tears to your eyes. **Richard Fairman**

Selected comparisons:

Bonyngne (12/79*) (DECC) 458 218-2DM

Pappano (10/12) (OPUS) OA1070D, OABD7102D

Puccini

Tosca

Angela Gheorghiu <i>sop</i>	Tosca
Jonas Kaufmann <i>ten</i>	Cavaradossi
Bryn Terfel <i>bass-bar</i>	Scarpia
Lukas Jakobski <i>bass</i>	Angelotti
Hubert Francis <i>ten</i>	Spoletta
Jeremy White <i>bass</i>	Sacristan
ZhengZhong Zhou <i>bar</i>	Sciarrone
John Morrissey <i>bass</i>	Gaoler
William Payne <i>treb</i>	Shepherd Boy

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House / Antonio Pappano

Stage director **Jonathan Kent**

Video director **Jonathan Haswell**

EMI Classics 404063-9; 404064-9 (120' + 8' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, July 2011

Bonus feature: 'Tosca: An Introduction', presented by Antonio Pappano



EMI issues the BBC-broadcast *Tosca* by Jonathan Kent

Hot on the heels of *Il trittico* from Opus Arte comes another Puccini DVD from the Royal Opera, this time on EMI. Like its predecessor, this release offers filming of the highest quality. When Jonathan Kent's production replaced the much-loved old Zeffirelli staging, made for Callas, it was expected that Kent would give the opera some novel slant; but in the event his *Tosca* is almost wholly traditional – a chapter of historical fiction, retaining all the opera's usual rituals and with handsome designs once it is past the opening act.

The cast assembles the most starry of the principals who have appeared in the production to date. Angela Gheorghiu makes a credible character out of Tosca, rolling eyes apart,

playing her as a proud, flirtatious, youthful woman. As a lyric soprano, she gives everything she has, yet her voice keeps its beauty at all but the most high-pressure moments. Jonas Kaufmann scores a complete success as a Cavaradossi who for once looks like the artist as archetypal romantic hero. What he lacks in Italianate open tone, he makes up in brooding, dark colours and his long, Heldentenor cry of 'Vittoria!' Neither of them would be likely to get the better of Bryn Terfel's bully of a Scarpia. The production's portrayal of him as a dissolute character, unshaven and with long, greasy hair, is perhaps doubtful but Terfel brings it off with aplomb, relishing the torture scene with a salacious smile and, though not in his best voice, singing on a grand scale. The supporting cast is decent, not more. The other dominant personality is Antonio Pappano, whose Puccini has never sounded better. The drive and drama are still here but listen to the affectionate *portamentos* he brings to the postlude of 'Recondita armonia' and the evil undertow that pulsates below Scarpia's 'Già mi dicon venal'. The orchestra pit teems with drama as vividly as the stage.

There is more competition for *Tosca* than for *Il tritico*. One of the Metropolitan Opera's DVDs has Pavarotti in his prime and a typically lavish production. Nikolaus Lehnhoff's high-powered Amsterdam staging offers a modern take on the opera, with Terfel as a James Bond-style villain stroking a white cat. A production from Zurich, not widely liked, also features Kaufmann. On balance, this new DVD is as involving at every level as any.

Richard Fairman

Selected comparisons:

RCO, Chailly (A/07) (DECC)  074 3201DH

Zurich Op, Carignani (DECC)  074 3420DH

Met Op, Conlon (DECC)  074 3410DH

R Strauss



Arabella

Emily Magee *sop* Arabella
 Genia Kühmeier *sop* Zdenka
 Tomasz Konieczny *bass-bar* Mandryka
 Wolfgang Bankl *bass* Count Waldner
 Zoryana Kushpler *mez* Adelaide
 Michael Schade *ten* Matteo
 Norbert Ernst *ten* Count Elemer
 Clemens Unterreiner *bar* Count Dominik
 Sorin Coliban *bass-bar* Count Lamoral
 Daniela Fally *sop* Flakermilli
 Donna Ellen *sop* Fortune-Teller
 Vienna State Opera Chorus and Orchestra /
 Franz Welser-Möst

Stage director Sven-Eric Bechtolf

Video director Don Kent

Electric Picture  EPC03DVD;  EPC04BD

(152' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live May 6 & 9, 2012

Extra feature: Cast Gallery



Bechtolf's 2006 Arabella on screen from Vienna

Arabella's premiere in 1933 in Dresden marked a return to fortune for Strauss and Hofmannsthal after the mixed receptions of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Die ägyptische Helena*, due in no little part, perhaps, to a plotline not so far removed from their most successful endeavour, *Der Rosenkavalier*. Certainly this tale of two pairs of lovers and mistaken identity at a ball would not have been out of a place in a late Mozart opera and drew from Strauss some of his most ardently romantic music.

The scenario centres on the title-character and her unwillingly cross-dressing sister, Zdenka, whose impoverished parents can only afford to launch one daughter into society. Zdenka loves the penniless Matteo but Matteo loves Arabella, who in turns adores Mandryka, a handsome stranger she has met in the street. However, Mandryka, heir to a fortune, has been drawn to Arabella by her father, who had sent him her portrait. First he wins her hand, then – due to Zdenka's contriving to sleep with Matteo, who believes he is making love to Arabella – loses it. All is resolved at the close in a satisfactorily happy ending.

This Vienna State Opera production from 2006 is happily satisfactory too. Sven-Eric Bechtolf's staging is reassuringly straightforward and in keeping with Hofmannsthal's scenario and Welser-Möst directs a beautifully manicured interpretation. The ball scene in Act 2 is the fulcrum on which the production turns and the denouement and final reconciliation are nicely prepared. The cast are uniformly strong, Konieczny outstanding as the passionate and foolish Mandryka. Bankl displays nice comic timing as the penurious Count Waldner but it is Emily Magee in the title-role, and her final duet with Konieczny is truly radiant. *Arabella's* problem is that, while reprising many of the mannerisms of earlier operas, it lacks the lasting memorableness of *Rosenkavalier* or *Ariadne*. Nevertheless, it is superbly constructed, slickly produced and ardently performed by singers and orchestra alike. Don Kent's video direction is unobtrusively natural, concentrating on the important details while conveying a good sense of the whole. More operas should be done this way.


Guy Rickards

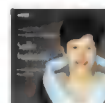
R Strauss

Ariadne auf Naxos – Ein Schönes war; Es gibt Reich.
Capriccio – Closing scene. *Der Rosenkavalier* – Die Ziet, die ist ein sonderbar Ding; Da geht er hin.
 Drei Hymnen, Op 71

Soile Isokoski *sop*

Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / Okko Kamu

Online  ODE1202-2 (61' • DDD)



A snapshot of Isokoski's Straussian operatic career

Ten years ago Soile Isokoski won the Editor's Choice *Gramophone* Award for Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* (4/02) and this follow-up disc of Strauss with orchestra has been a long time coming. The main attraction of the programme is the *Drei Hymnen*, which do not come round in recordings very often. At over 20 minutes, they are almost as substantial as the *Vier letzte Lieder*, even if they have never attained the same popularity. Hölderlin's poems are rather pretentious and Strauss responded with music that finds it difficult to settle, except in the ravishing, gentle ecstasy of the middle song, the loveliest of the three. Isokoski is highly sensitive in that, nicely set off against the flickering detail of the luminous orchestral accompaniment, and rises well to the more dramatic demands of the outer songs, where there are echoes of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

The rest of the disc comprises excerpts from Isokoski's Strauss roles on stage. As each of her three Straussian heroines, she embodies a very touching, human vulnerability – warm-hearted as *Ariadne*, wistful as the *Marschallin* and quietly reflective as the Countess in *Capriccio*, though she and Kamu get nothing like the variety out of the closing scene that Schwarzkopf and Karajan do. The two extracts from *Der Rosenkavalier* come in the wrong order and are presented crudely as 'bleeding chunks'. Overall, this disc is not quite at the high level of its Award-winning predecessor – Isokoski's vibrato is sometimes more intrusive and Kamu is less inspiring a Straussian than Janowski was – but it is a welcome addition to the Strauss discography none the less. Many collectors may feel it is worth having for the *Drei Hymnen* alone.

Richard Fairman

Stravinsky



Perséphone

Paul Groves *ten* Eumolpe
 Dominique Blanc *actress* Perséphone

Tchaikovsky

Iolanta

Ekaterina Scherbachenko *sop* Iolanta
 Pavel Černoch *ten* Vaudémont
 Alexej Markov *bar* Robert
 Dmitry Ullianov *bass* King René
 Willard White *bass* Ibn-Hakia
 Ekaterina Semenchuk *mez* Martha
 Vasily Efimov *ten* Almeric
 Irina Churilova *sop* Brigitte
 Letitia Singleton *mez* Laura
 Pavel Kudinov *bass* Bertrand
 Young Singers of the JORCAM; Chorus and Orchestra
 of the Teatro Real, Madrid / Teodor Currentzis

Stage and video director Peter Sellars



Paul Groves, and the accompanying choruses of children and adults, in the Teatro Real's *Perséphone*

Teatro Real © TR97011DVD; © TR97010BD
(3h 7' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • D • s)

Recorded live 2012

Extra feature: 'In Search of the Light: Insights on *Iolanta* and *Perséphone*'



Sellers pairs Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky in Madrid

With Gerard Mortier at the helm, the Teatro Real de Madrid is going from strength to strength. *Iolanta*, a one-act opera, is an awkward length (extended here, as we shall see): it was originally performed with *The Nutcracker* but Peter Sellers has instead imaginatively paired it with Stravinsky's 'melodrama' *Perséphone*.

Like many other operas, *Iolanta* is concerned with the transition from darkness to light: a tale of a princess who has been brought up in ignorance of her blindness. Ibn-Hakia, the Moorish physician, tells King René that his daughter can gain her sight provided she wills her cure: entailing, of course, her coming to understand her condition. It's a stranger, the Burgundian prince Vaudémont, who unwittingly lets the cat out of the bag; and it's their mutual love that enables *Iolanta* to see at last. Rimsky-Korsakov found the opera 'one of Tchaikovsky's feeblest compositions': lopsided, perhaps, but Rimsky's execration of the 'topsy-turvy' orchestration is hard to understand.

Rimsky particularly objected to the wind-only introduction. Its chromaticism, which sets the scene, is offset by beautiful diatonic writing for an onstage string quartet. The setting is simple: platforms and arches, the characters in

unspecific modern dress. The cast is led by Ekaterina Scherbachenko as a touching *Iolanta*, with Pavel Černoč as her ardent suitor. Dmitry Ulianov, Willard White and Alexej Markov deliver their set pieces admirably but time and again one's attention is caught by Sellers's telling direction: faces suffused in light, faces caught in profile. Towards the end the action stops and an offstage choir sings the first part of the 'Cherubic Hymn' from the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*: a typical Sellers insertion, but it's a pity that he makes cuts elsewhere.

Perséphone, also about light and dark, is staged with the same set. It's not so well suited to the video medium: you want to see both *Perséphones* – reciter and dancer – but often you can't. Sam Sathya and her fellow artists from Cambodia – mimes rather than dancers, really – are models of grace. After a slithery start, Paul Groves sings cleanly and heroically as Eumolpe. With his stick, white suit and dark glasses, he seems to have wandered in as Tiresias from *Oedipus Rex* – or is that stick the oar of Charon's boat? Teodor Currentzis conducts both pieces impeccably: don't miss.

Richard Lawrence

Verdi

'A Musical Journey'

Un ballo in maschera – Amici miei, soldati!... La rivedrà nell'estasi!^b. **Il corsaro** – Eccoli prigioniero! **Don Carlo** – Fontainebleau! foresta immensa e solitaria!...Io la vidi e al suo sorriso. **I due Foscari** – Qui ti rimani alquanto...Odio solo, ed odio atroce^c. **Falstaff** – Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola^b. **I Lombardi** – La mia letizia infondere. **Oberto** – Ciel, che feci!...Ciel pietoso. **Rigoletto** –

La donna è mobile; Questa o quella. **La traviata** – Lunge da lei...De' miei bollenti spiriti; O mio rimorso! **Requiem** – Ingemisco tamquam reus. Brindisi^a. L'esule^a. In solitaria stanza^a (^aorch Berio) **Rolando Villazón** ten with ^b**Mojca Erdmann** sop ^c**Vicente Ombuena** ten **Turin Teatro Regio** ^d**Chorus and Orchestra** / Gianandrea Noseda
DG © 477 9460GH (57' • DDD • T/V)



Villazón back in the studio singing Verdi with Noseda

It was good to see and hear this tenor back in action at the end of 2012 with this not-so-everyday Verdi programme and for Covent Garden performances of *La bohème*. The recital on disc proceeds chronologically. The orchestrations of the *romanze* performed here are by Berio and, *pace* his own detailed note on his publisher UE's website, are more 19th-century traditional than his modernistic adventure with the completed *Turandot*.

The arias from the earlier operas are intriguing beyond their vocal opportunities. Right from his starting point in the late 1830s – even taking as a given the practice of orchestrating late in the day once he had heard the chosen singers – Verdi sought to provide settings for the emotions of his characters that brought the orchestra (especially its wind and string principals) as fully into the drama as Wagner was to claim credit for. Also, his selection of forms is distinctive and, compared to Bellini, Donizetti and even Rossini, unconventional.

The nature of then contemporary Italian music drama liked extreme melodrama –

eg Riccardo in *Oberto* has just killed the hero, Jacopo in *Foscari* and Corrado in *Corsaro* are in lonely, desperate states and Oronte (*Lombardi*) in love with a captive, Giselda, of an unapproachably different creed. But it is clear that Verdi already is probing one degree deeper to find the psychology behind the cartoon of crude action.

Villazón has made an interesting choice of programme. Even his more 'pop' items are not clichéd – Carlo's opening monologue, Fenton in Windsor Forest, the 'Ingemisco' from the Requiem. His sense of style and occasion are as unbridled as ever, the top of the voice not quite as free as it once was. Nosedá, for British ears now out of Manchester mufti with his Turin company orchestra, has the taste not to try to make a whole opera out of each aria.

Mike Ashman

Wagner



Der Ring des Nibelungen

Das Rheingold

Bryn Terfel <i>bass-bar</i>	Wotan
Stephanie Blythe <i>mez</i>	Fricka
Richard Croft <i>ten</i>	Loge
Gerhard Siegel <i>ten</i>	Mime
Eric Owens <i>bass-bar</i>	Alberich
Wendy Bryn Harmer <i>sop</i>	Frela
Adam Diegel <i>ten</i>	Froh
Dwayne Croft <i>bar</i>	Donner
Patricia Bardon <i>mez</i>	Erda
Franz-Josef Sellg <i>bass</i>	Fasolt
Hans-Peter König <i>bass</i>	Fafner
Lisette Oropesa <i>sop</i>	Woglinde
Jennifer Johnson Cano <i>mez</i>	Wellgunde
Tamara Mumford <i>mez</i>	Flosshilde
Die Walküre	
Jonas Kaufmann <i>ten</i>	Siegmund
Eva-Maria Westbroek <i>sop</i>	Sieglinde
Deborah Voigt <i>sop</i>	Brünnhilde
Bryn Terfel <i>bass-bar</i>	Wotan
Stephanie Blythe <i>mez</i>	Fricka
Hans-Peter König <i>bass</i>	Hunding
Kelly Cae Hogan <i>sop</i>	Gerhilde
Molly Fillmore <i>sop</i>	Helmwige
Wendy Bryn Harmer <i>sop</i>	Ortlinde
Marjorie Elinor Dix <i>mez</i>	Waltraute
Lindsay Ammann <i>mez</i>	Rosswelsse
Eve Gigliotti <i>mez</i>	Siegrune
Mary Ann McCormick <i>mez</i>	Grimgerde
Mary Phillips <i>mez</i>	Schwertleite
Siegfried	
Jay Hunter Morris <i>ten</i>	Siegfried
Bryn Terfel <i>bass-bar</i>	Wanderer
Deborah Voigt <i>sop</i>	Brünnhilde
Gerhard Siegel <i>ten</i>	Mime
Eric Owens <i>bass-bar</i>	Alberich
Patricia Bardon <i>mez</i>	Erda
Hans-Peter König <i>bass</i>	Fafner
Mojca Erdmann <i>sop</i>	Woodbird
Götterdämmerung	
Deborah Voigt <i>sop</i>	Brünnhilde
Jay Hunter Morris <i>ten</i>	Siegfried

Hans-Peter König *bass*

Eric Owens *bass-bar*

Iain Paterson *bar*

Wendy Bryn Harmer *sop*

Waltraud Meier *sop*

Erin Morley *sop*

Jennifer Johnson Cano *mez*

Tamara Mumford *mez*

Maria Radner *contr*

Elizabeth Bishop *mez*

Heidi Melton *sop*

Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera,
New York / James Levine, Fabio Luisi

Stage director Robert Lepage

DG ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫ ⑬ ⑭ ⑮ ⑯ ⑰ ⑱ ⑲ ⑳ ㉑ ㉒ ㉓ ㉔ ㉕ ㉖ ㉗ ㉘ ㉙ ㉚ ㉛ ㉜ ㉝ ㉞ ㉟ ㊱ ㊲ ㊳ ㊴ ㊵ ㊶ ㊷ ㊸ ㊹ ㊺ ㊻ ㊼ ㊽ ㊾ ㊿ 073 4770GH8; ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ㉑ ㉒ ㉓ ㉔ ㉕ ㉖ ㉗ ㉘ ㉙ ㉚ ㉛ ㉜ ㉝ ㉞ ㉟ ㊱ ㊲ ㊳ ㊴ ㊵ ㊶ ㊷ ㊸ ㊹ ㊺ ㊻ ㊼ ㊽ ㊾ ㊿ 073 4771GH5
(16h 14' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA, DTS5.1
& PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2012

Includes documentary film 'Wagner's Dream'



Lepage's hydraulic Ring from the Met on eight DVDs

Ever since Eduard Hanslick's complaints of too much talk of steam and dragons (at *Das Rheingold*'s Munich premiere in September 1869), commentators have harped on ad nauseam about the expense and technical challenges of *Ring* productions. And nowhere more so than at the Metropolitan Opera's new 2010/12 Robert Lepage/Carl Fillion staging. But the disappointment in Fillion's unit set of hydraulic moving planks is that, at least as filmed for the small screen, it rarely provides the telling – not to mention useful – images and set-ups that the four operas need. Also, the lighting and projection work (again, as filmed) do little more than provide filler cover for the boring bare planks – projected water and moss as, erm, water and moss, or an over-cute docu-style film of a coloured bird as the onstage visual reference for Mojca Erdmann's (exceptionally clearly sung) Woodbird.

While the positions of Fillion's construction often do little more than give the singers a flat ramp downstage backed by a wall, Lepage's *Personenregie* seems (again, as filmed) surprisingly literal and conservative. The only real characterisation comes from the (perhaps) personally imported efforts of Terfel, Kaufmann, Westbroek, Morris, Meier and Iain Paterson's Gunther. But even Terfel's Wotan, imposing in a generalised way physically and vocally, and always alive in face and eyes, is small beer compared with the complex psychological portrait he has achieved in Keith Warner's Covent Garden staging. For just one act Kaufmann and Westbroek project the right kind of sexual and emotional intensity to carry the drama in the very bare setting that they're in, a tension matched elsewhere only by Meier's masterclass of a Waltraute. Morris – starting as effectively the cover of a cover – is a likeable, imaginative and fluently (if not hugely)

GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

The Met's first screen Ring

A decade ago the New York house issued a screen Ring, with Levine conducting the lot



JANUARY 2003

Wagner *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

Soloists; Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, New York / James Levine
DG ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫ ⑬ ⑭ ⑮ ⑯ ⑰ ⑱ ⑲ ⑳ ㉑ ㉒ ㉓ ㉔ ㉕ ㉖ ㉗ ㉘ ㉙ ㉚ ㉛ ㉜ ㉝ ㉞ ㉟ ㊱ ㊲ ㊳ ㊴ ㊵ ㊶ ㊷ ㊸ ㊹ ㊺ ㊻ ㊼ ㊽ ㊾ ㊿ 073 043-9GH7 (15h 41' • 4:3 • 0)
DVD's second *Ring* cycle deserves a warm welcome, however qualified. It's the only one Wagner would have recognised. It's frequently assumed that he chose myth primarily to convey political allegory, but this is misleading. Myth inspired Wagner as directly as it did, say, Sibelius; and producers who ignore or mock this miss a vital dimension. Here, director Otto Schenk and designer Gunther Schneider-Siemssen preserve the Romantic Imagery, often beautifully; but unimaginatively, with too many tired compromises.

This set can also claim musical superiority; but again, not conclusively. Boulez (A/O1) mistakes speed for energy, drying out the richness of the score; Levine tends to wallow in it, especially in a disappointing *Rheingold*. Matters improve from *Walküre* onward, but he is prone to sudden wheel-spinning accelerations, sometimes wrong-footing his singers. Boulez remains invisible at Bayreuth; Levine is too much with us, to the detriment of atmosphere. Nevertheless, his monumental approach does bring out *The Ring*'s sheer beauty and grandeur, where Boulez simply seems glib.

Levine's cast is superior, too, although the pivotal roles are the closest. Both Brünnhildes are splendid, spirited and deeply moving, but Boulez's Gwyneth Jones has the fuller voice; Hildegard Behrens, lithe and nervy, must force an essentially lyric instrument – quite successfully, but the effort shows.

Levine's tempi in *Rheingold* rival those of Reginald Goodall, but without his structure and pacing; the Giants' entrance is marked *molto pesante*, not funereal. They, the Rhinemaidens and the lesser gods – especially Birgitta Svendén's keen-voiced Erda – outclass their betters. Levine handles *Walküre* more successfully. *Siegfried* is visually and musically the best, with Levine at his liveliest, and a Romantic forest out of Altdorfer or von Schwind. Jerusalem's ardent hero may lack Heldentenor heft, and suffer some constraint at the top, but he carries off the forging and lyrical scenes with credit.

Levine's expansiveness suits *Götterdämmerung*, which opens with a powerful trio of Norns and a radiant Dawn duet. The Immolation strains Ludwig's voice, but remains satisfyingly cathartic, aided by appropriate stage spectacle, though Valhalla's downfall is disappointing. All told, while this set may be less stimulating than the Boulez, it is also less distracting – without, as an eminent colleague once remarked, someone forever shouting in your ear.

Michael Scott Rohan

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gramophone.co.uk

voiced Siegfried, somewhat in the manner of Alberto Remedios, more vocally at ease in the earlier of his two operas. His achievement to come this far in such a context is considerable. Paterson makes (and sings) Gunther into quite an event.

Elsewhere there is solid singing from the 'baddie' basses – and perhaps rather more than that from Eric Owens's Alberich (but why is he so noble?) and much evidently enjoyed hard work from Deborah Voigt's Brünnhilde, predictably more comfortable vocally with the upper range of the *Siegfried* scenes than the lower *Walküre* or more full-on loud *Götterdämmerung*. Voigt's duets with her men go well but compared with, say, Jones (for Boulez/Chéreau – DG), Evans (for Barenboim/Kupfer – Warner, 10/05 *passim*) or Behrens (for Levine/Schenk – DG, 1/03 – the old Met *Ring*) she has some way to go before looking and sounding like a natural Wotan daughter. It must be said that no one is helped by costumes that – presumably intended to be mythical – have ended up like three-dimensional realisations of the poorer attempts made in recent years to illustrate the cycle in story comic books.

Another disappointment of the release is the loss of James Levine halfway through. Not that there is anything 'wrong' with Fabio Luisi's faster, lighter, less detailed accompaniment, just that the Met's now retiring chief (and his quite stunningly playing orchestra) was on prime form for *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, more locked into the drama in both pace and colour than was his previous Wagner in New York or Bayreuth. Sound and balance on the DVDs are good (with, I would imagine, quite a lot of intervention); filming is oddly workaday, with annoying glitches as ill-timed pans don't quite catch a singer's face in time for a vocal entry. So, regrettably in summary, the result, surprisingly for this new Met administration, is a boring, conventional, narrative stage production with some undoubted musical highs. **Mike Ashman**

Joyce DiDonato

'Drama Queens'

Cesti *Orontea* – Intorno all'idol mio **Giacomelli** Merope – Sposa, son disprezzata **Handel** Alcina – Ma quando tornerai. **Alessandro** – Brilla nell'alma. **Giulio Cesare** In Egitto – E pur così in un giorno... **Piangerò** la sorte mia **Hasse** Antonio e Cleopatra – Morte col fiero aspetto **Haydn** Armida – Vedi, se t'amo...Odio, furor, dispetto **Keiser** *Fredegunda* – Lasciami piangere. *Octavia* – Geloso sospetto **Monteverdi** *L'incoronazione di Poppea* – Disprezzata regina **Orlandini** *Berenice* – Col versar, barbaro, il sangue; Da torbida procella **Porta** *Ifigenia in Aulide* – Madre diletta, abbracciarmi **Joyce DiDonato** *mez*
Il Complesso Barocco / **Alan Curtis**
Virgin Classics © 602654-2 (77) • DDD • T/t



DiDonato with royal heroines from Monteverdi to Haydn

It seems Joyce DiDonato possesses a sense of humour. Following on from a cross-dressing album entitled 'Diva/Divo' (4/11), now we get 'Drama Queens' – a concept album presenting scenes for female characters, most of them of regal persuasion but a couple of them vengeful sorceresses, by composers stretching from Monteverdi to Haydn. This whistle-stop survey of different dramatic emotions and musical styles not only presents major names such as Handel (represented thrice) but also proffers intriguing fare by composers usually encountered only in musicological tomes.

DiDonato produces her most emotionally moving and sensitively embellished singing in 'Madre diletta' from Porta's *Ifigenia in Aulide* (1738), an extraordinary *siciliana* in which the Mycenaean princess accepts that she must be sacrificed by her father Agamemnon and bids her mother Clytemnestra farewell. The weeping strings for the heartbroken Galsuinde in 'Lasciami piangere' (*Fredegunda*, 1715) and the astonishing sonority of five bassoons for the jealous title-character in *Octavia* (1705) each demonstrate why Keiser was highly esteemed by his German contemporaries. Handel's major-key lament with flute for Cleopatra ('Piangerò') is contrasted with Hasse's extremely vivid minor-key suicide scene with forceful strings for the same character ('Morte col fiero aspetto'). Il Complesso Barocco and Alan Curtis are on particularly good form, contributing lyricism to love music such as 'Intorno all'idol mio' from Cesti's *Orontea* (1656) and animated vigour to a couple of quick arias from Orlandini's *Berenice* (1725). Wonderfully sung, passionately played and programmed intelligently – an exemplary recital. **David Vickers**

Elina Garanča

'Romantique'

Berlioz *La damnation de Faust* – D'amour l'ardente flamme **Donizetti** *La favorite* – L'ai-je bien entendu...O mon Fernand! **Gounod** *Faust* – Faites-lui mes aveux. La reine de Saba – Me voilà seule, enfin!...Plus grand, dans son obscurité. **Sapho** – Où suis-je?...O ma lyre immortelle **Lalo** Le roi d'Ys – De tous côtés j'aperçois dans la plaine...Lorsque je t'ai vu soudain **Saint-Saëns** *Samson et Dalila* – Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix **Tchaikovsky** *The Maid of Orléans* – Adieu, forêts **Vaccal** *Giulietta e Romeo* – Oh, vista è dèssal...Ah! se tu dormi, svegliati! **Elina Garanča** *mez* **Bologna Teatro Comunale Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Yves Abel**
DG © 479 0071GH (61) • DDD • T/t



Romantic heroines in the studio from mezzo Garanča

Donizetti's *La favorite* is better known as *La favorita*; but, like *The Sicilian Vespers* and *Don Carlos*, it's a French opera, composed for Paris in 1840. Fernand and Léonor [*sic*] are about to marry, without his knowing that she is the mistress of the king. In 'O mon Fernand!', Léonor expresses her shame and despair. Elina Garanča sings the slow section with artless simplicity and the cabaletta with passion. It's good to learn that she plans to sing the part onstage.

She seems not to have performed most of the other roles represented here, the paradoxical exception being *La damnation de Faust*. Marguerite's soliloquy, accompanied by an eloquent cor anglais, is movingly done; and Garanča gets even better with the urgent syncopations at 'Je suis à ma fenêtre'. The cor anglais is also prominent in Dalila's 'Softly awakes my heart'. Couldn't DG have fielded a tenor for Samson's contributions? Never mind: Garanča is sensuous without being vampish – quite an achievement in this part.

Apart from Siébel's impulsive little number in *Faust* – what a beautiful *diminuendo* on the cellos before the entry of the voice! – the rest is less well known. Joan of Arc's aria has echoes of both Tatyana's Letter Scene and Lensky's farewell to life in *Eugene Onegin* but it's none the worse for that. Garanča moves effortlessly from top to bottom without ever sacrificing beauty of tone. The Vaccai aria, regularly substituted throughout the 19th century for Bellini's own ending to *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, is well worth hearing, as are the airs by Gounod and Lalo. Fans – and others – need not hesitate.

Richard Lawrence

Marie-Nicole Lemieux

Gluck *Iphigénie en Aulide* – Jupiter, lance la foudre. Orfeo ed Euridice – Che farò senza Euridice **Graun** *Montezuma* – Del mio destin tiranno **Haydn** *L'isola disabitata* – Se non piange un'infelice. Il ritorno di Tobia – Sudò il guerriero **Mozart** *La Betulia liberata*, K118 – Parto inerme e non pavento. La clemenza di Tito – Deh, per questo istante solo. *Mitridate*, re di Ponto – Overture; Venga pur, minacci e frema. Le nozze di Figaro – Voi che sapete. *Ombra felice*!...Io ti lascio, K255

Marie-Nicole Lemieux *contr*

Les Violons du Roy / **Bernard Labadie**
Naïve © V5264 (69) • DDD



Canadian snapshot of the first decades of Classical opera

Marie-Nicole Lemieux, who was so impressive in Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* (6/12), here tackles an unhackneyed array of arias from the 18th century. The orchestra and conductor, like her, are Canadian. You might think that a band called Les Violons du Roy would feature period instruments: it doesn't, but the playing is lean and muscular, with plenty of light and air. Five

of the nine Italian arias were written for a castrato. The central number, and at nearly 12 minutes the longest, is the excerpt from Graun's *Montezuma* (1755). The Aztec king faces death with courage, a weeping figure on the violins giving voice to his feelings. Sesto, the lovelorn traitor in *La clemenza di Tito*, is in a similar situation: Mozart opts for ravishing beauty, as Gluck had done in Orfeo's 'Che farò'. Lemieux brings warm tone and ravishing phrasing to all three arias. She is also splendidly defiant in Farnace's aria from *Mitridate* and heartfelt in the concert aria 'Io ti lascio'.

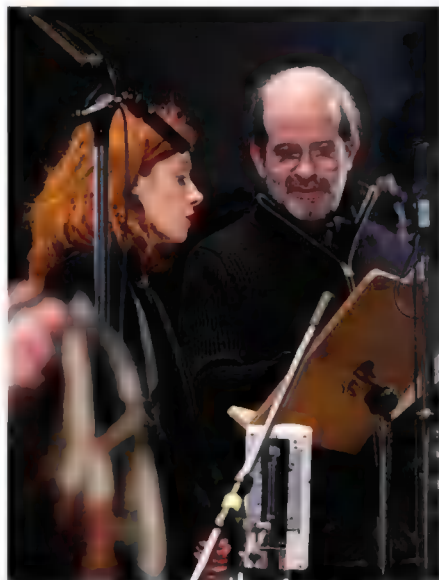
From castrato via the adolescent Cherubino to real women. The Haydn arias are nicely contrasted, with more sighing in Costanza's lament from *L'isola disabitata* and coloratura in the excerpt from *Il ritorno di Tobia*. The only other aria from an oratorio is from Mozart's *La Betulia liberata*. Lemieux is mesmerising with her soft tone in the slow central section, where Judith sings of her being inspired by God.

Lemieux's spine-tingling account of Clytemnestra's air in *Iphigénie en Aulide* is complemented by Bernard Labadie's attention to detail, notably in the way his cellos and basses dig into their notes in the preceding recitative. Good sound, except for a backward harpsichord. **Richard Lawrence**

Patricia Petibon

'Nouveau monde: Baroque Arias and Songs'

Anonymous Mon amy s'en est allé **Le Bailly** Yo soy la locura (Pasacalle: La folie) **M-A Charpentier** Mercure galant - Sans frayeur dans ce bois. *Médée* - Quel prix de mon amour!; Noires filles du Styx; L'Enfer obéit à ta voix; Dieu du Cocyte et des royaumes sombres **Handel** Cantata spagnuola, HWV140 - No se enmendará jamás **Nebra** Vendado es amor, no es ciego - El bajel que no recela; En amor, pastorillos **Purcell** Dido and Aeneas - Thy hand, Belinda...When I am laid in earth. King Arthur



Compulsive: Patricia Petibon and Andrea Marcon

- Fairest Isle **Rameau** Les Indes galantes^a - Danse du Grand Calumet de la Paix; Forêts paisibles; La nuit couvre les cieux! **Traditional** Cachua a voz y bajo Al Nacimiento de Christo Nuestro Señor.

Tornada La Lata a voz y bajo para bailar cantando. Tornada El Congo a voz y bajo para bailar cantando. Greensleeves. J'ai vu le loup

Patricia Petibon sop^a **Kevin Greenlaw** bar

La Cetra Vocal Ensemble and Baroque Orchestra,

Basle / Andrea Marcon

DG © 479 0079GH (68' • DDD • T/1)



Petibon journeys from the Old World to the New

With Christopher Columbus (yes, him from 1492) joining Harmoncourt, William Christie and Savall on the dedicatees' list, Petibon's new release explodes like an alt-folk concept album. As Basle's La Cetra, plus certain South American obbligato instruments, Baroque and baroll behind the French soprano, it can get loud - José de Nebra's opening zarzuela aria (1744) sounds like an attempt at all four Handel *Coronation Anthems* in less than six minutes while Petibon's contribution mixes a tale of shipwrecked love with yelping early salsa-style vocalises. For contrast there's a serene 'Greensleeves' and a wonderful, painfully impassioned (if exotically pronounced) 'When I am laid in earth'. Then the mocking demons in Charpentier's *Médée* and their grungy accompaniment sound like contemporaries of Purcell's witches and sailors. Marcon's band get a break of their own in further Charpentier before their whistles and thundersheets kick up the storm that nearly overwhelms the heroine in *Les Indes galantes*. We may be on the way to a 'new world' - Petibon's booklet interview links up influences including Brazilian rock radio, Haneke's *Don Giovanni* and Cortés's Conquistadors - and we reach it eventually at Purcell's 'Fairest isle', but there's plenty of well-acted heartbreak on the way.

Like her equally Spanish-tinged 'Melancolia' album (1/12) - but with totally other colours - 'Nouveau monde' is a tightly thought-through and arranged and compelling programme, a *tour de force* for its performer/compiler, most atmospherically recorded. Compulsive, repeatable listening. **Mike Ashman**

'Arias for Marietta Marcolini'

Coccia La donna selvaggia - Tu mi stringi **Mayr** Il sacrificio d'Ifigenia - Sol di morte **Mosca** Le bestie in uomini - Mentre guardo **Paer** L'eroismo in amore - Io morirò **Rossini** *Ciro in Babilonia* - T'abbraccio, ti stringo. *L'equivoco stravagante* - Se per te lieta ritorno. *L'italiana in Algeri* - Pensa alla patria; Per lui che adoro **Weigl** *L'imboscata* - Dille che in lei rispetto

Ann Hallenberg mez **SSO Chamber Choir;**

Stavanger Symphony Orchestra / Fabio Blondi

Naïve © V5309 (70' • DDD)



Swedish mezzo in the shoes of a Florentine contralto

'Arias for Marietta Marcolini: Rossini's first muse', runs the rubric. In his delightful, romanticising Rossini biography, Stendhal even maintained that the first great coloratura contralto and the composer were lovers. What we do know is that by the time she met the 19-year-old Rossini in 1811, Marcolini was an established star, renowned in the operas of Ferdinando Paer, the Italianised German Simon Mayr and assorted Neapolitans. Like so many others, Rossini was entranced by her vocal splendour, her dazzling agility and her gifts as a comedienne. The admiration was mutual. For La Marcolini he wrote five varied roles between 1811 and 1814, including Isabella, the wily and captivating heroine of his earliest comic masterpiece, *L'italiana in Algeri*.

A latter-day Swedish Marcolini here celebrates the diva's association with Rossini alongside roles created for her by Mayr, Paer and the more obscure figures of Joseph Weigl, Giuseppe Mosca and Carlo Coccia. If the Rossini items have a melodic allure, comic élan and poignancy beyond the reach of his older contemporaries, there is charm and spirit aplenty, not least in the colourful wind obbligatos. Clarinet and voice duet soulfully at the opening of the Weigl aria, while Alcina's scena from Mosca's Ariosto spoof, *Le bestie in uomini*, becomes a bravura double concerto for mezzo and horn.

Having won plaudits in Handel and Vivaldi, Ann Hallenberg proves no less persuasive in *bel canto*. Just occasionally she sounds stretched in the stratosphere. But her even, gleaming tone, eloquence of phrase and fluent, never mechanical coloratura give virtually unalloyed pleasure. Nothing she does is forced or mannered. Like Marcolini, too, she is an adroit comedienne. In Isabella's 'Per lui che adoro' - which like Susanna's 'Deh vieni' in *Figaro* is at once a love song and part of a comic ruse - Hallenberg judges perfectly the shifts between sensuous grace and sly knowingness. She revels in the zany, over-the-top cabaletta of the Mosca scena, finds a deeper, bronzed tone for the girl-as-warrior heroine of Rossini's little-known early comedy *L'equivoco stravagante*, while in the scene from *Ciro in Babilonia* she movingly catches Cyrus's paternal tenderness before hurling volleys of furious coloratura at the tyrant. If the male chorus can sound a bit raw, the orchestral playing under the sympathetic Fabio Biondi - less hyperactive than he is in Baroque repertoire - is lively and polished, with some excellent wind obbligatos. Other mezzos in this repertoire may have richer, ampler voices than Hallenberg's; on this evidence, few could equal her style, zest and coloratura brilliance. **Richard Wigmore**

Books



Colin Anderson eavesdrops on conversations with Thomas Adès:

'Here is a man, Adès, who can seem aloof, indifferent and insular, and yet whose eyes can burn with opinionated thought'



Rob Cowan compares two additions to the Toscanini library:

'The story is one of personal charisma, musical honesty, unstinting concentration, emotional vulnerability and nobility of spirit'

Thomas Adès: Full of Noises

Conversations with Tom Service

Faber, HB, 208pp, £16.99

ISBN 978-0-571-27897-8



In the puffy presentation of this book, big claims are made for Thomas Adès. He is, for example, 'the musician who has done more than any other living composer to connect contemporary music with wider audiences'. Maybe, but those in the John Adams camp will surely be offering their man up for a similar accolade. But this is not about competing composers; rather it is about what the enthusiastic, probing and tenacious Tom Service, such a popular host these days on BBC Radio 3, has elicited from Adès, a notably enigmatic and reclusive man. Service has in fact secured some very interesting responses, some illuminating, some wacky, and all adding up to a portrait of Adès that is revealing, very personal and sometimes difficult to come to terms with. Fans of Mahler, Verdi and Wagner will quite likely be offended, while admirers of Chopin and Janáček will wear a beaming smile on their faces.

Not that the book is flawless in its presentation. There are nine chapters of conversations, arranged into a deliberately serendipitous order, but there is no mention of the individual page numbers in order to find any one chapter, which is sloppy. The scripts themselves seem like a verbatim transcript of these various conversations, which took place in 2011. Although the sparring between the two men is vividly conveyed, sometimes with verbal fisticuffs, there are times when a little editorial fine-tuning (or more of it) might have been an advantage; it is one thing to have been a fly on the wall during these sessions, it is another to be reading the exchanges coldly as a third party away from the dialogue and its various inflections, volumes and temperaments.

Nevertheless, over the 178 pages of discussion (further pages are devoted to a list of Adès's compositions and an index), in

a very readable typeface, the reader can be illuminated and repelled in equal measure, and in entirely different ways according to his responses. Certainly Adès holds some pretty cryptic views, maybe those of a deep philosopher or a deliberate provocateur. He talks about the potential of one note, how he composes (and revises) – not least his opera *The Tempest* – and, although he is not overtly technical, it does help to have a knowledge of some of his music, not just *The Tempest* but also *Powder Her Face*, *Asyla* and the Piano Quintet.

Adès also talks about the organic composing of opera, about getting chords out of his system and the precision of a printed score against the unpredictability of a performance, which includes his own experiences as a conductor and his opinions regarding live versus studio recording. He also recalls his time as director of the Aldeburgh Festival; Britten gets a bit of bashing, too, for Adès finds *Peter Grimes* 'embarrassing', and other Britten stage works also come in for flak, although the views Adès now holds are very different from his teenage years, a change of reaction that he analyses during the course of these conversations, pushed on, and sometimes beyond, by Service.

There are times when Adès's assertions seem wild and contentious, superficial even, and which are difficult to take convincingly. On other occasions one is drawn into a private world of musical thinking that is fascinating. The banter between Adès and Service reports a good relationship between the protagonists, which does not rule out several put-downs from the composer or a sustained interrogation from the interviewer. Best to read it quickly, as if in the room with them, and become involved in the refreshingly rude if honest exchanges, although sometimes rigidity sets in – this is where some (more) editing would have been an advantage.

Here is a man, Adès, who can seem aloof, indifferent and insular, and yet whose eyes can burn with opinionated thought. Unfortunately the coldness of the page fails to reveal whether he is offering sarcasm

or a deeply felt conviction. That is for the reader to determine after reading again and reflecting on a personal listing of selections that either inflame or illuminate. So the book is recommended for its potential controversy. By the way, the Earth revolves in A major, a low A. **Colin Anderson**

Toscanini in Britain

By Christopher Dymant

Boydell Press, 398pp, HB, £30

ISBN 978-1-84383-789-3

The Real Toscanini

Musicians Reveal the Maestro

By Cesare Civetta

Amadeus Press, 260pp, PB, £18.95

ISBN 978-1-57467-241-1



Toscanini's bibliography is of very variable quality. In recent years Harvey Sachs's biography and Mortimer Frank's survey of Toscanini's recorded legacy with the NBC Symphony Orchestra are probably the best we've had – until now. Cesare Civetta's *The Real Toscanini* is in essence a portrait through interviews with various players, some with the author, others borrowed from elsewhere and nearly all adulatory. The story thus told is one of personal charisma, musical honesty, unstinting concentration, staunch opposition to fascism, emotional vulnerability and, above all, nobility of spirit. None of this will surprise Toscanini devotees but if as yet you know nothing of the man who was widely celebrated as 'The Maestro' then Civetta's anthology will almost certainly arouse your interest. Can anyone be that good? Yes, and Christopher Dymant's more focused study helps explain why.

Toscanini's first British conducting appearance was in 1930 with the New York Philharmonic Symphony. Three years earlier Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic had impressed audiences with a richness of tone and tightness of ensemble that were as of



The man they called 'The Maestro': Arturo Toscanini in action

then virtually unknown to British orchestras. But when Toscanini arrived, praise embraced not only pristine orchestral execution but the conductor's unparalleled ability to have the music 'get right inside you' (Ernest Newman). Civetta's interviewees largely concur with this view. NBC oboist Robert Bloom, for example, compares Toscanini's meaningful baton and wonderful face with an 'obscene' telecast of Leonard Bernstein conducting Tchaikovsky: 'You know, "Ah! Ah!" – the suffering,' says Bloom, adding 'You see, if someone had done that in Toscanini's day, we would have laughed him off the stage'.

Dymant leads us from Toscanini's 1930 New York tour through unsuccessful London invitations to the triumphant first BBC Symphony concerts of 1935. Very often the subtler, less expected insights leave the strongest impression. For example, at a press reception held jointly with Adrian Boult during that year, Toscanini not only acceded to the idea of employing women in his orchestras but interestingly responded to a question regarding an alternative approach to *appoggiaturas* in the *Allegretto* of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony with hypnotic flashing eyes and a quick sweep of

the hand. Quite a contrast to Civetta's quote from NBC Symphony clarinetist David Weber, who recalled Toscanini conducting *La bohème* and doubling arpeggios in the harp because, and here I quote Toscanini himself, 'Puccini didn't know how to orchestrate. I had to teach him everything!' Other fascinating aspects of Dymant's book include characteristically detailed analyses of individual interpretations (among the best ever published) and painstakingly researched discographical information. Civetta's text on the other hand could have done with some linking critical commentary. One player says, regarding Toscanini's way with Mozart, that 'there were no stops and starts, no *ritards* and *accelerandos*; the music just went on,' whereas another remarked on 'a little modification of tempo' at the start of the *Haffner* Symphony, which with the New York Philharmonic and BBC Symphony Orchestras was, to be truthful, large rather than little.

Toscanini in Britain references important live recordings, including portions of rehearsal from Toscanini's 1926 Beethoven cycle at La Scala (a few shellac sides survive) and his fear bordering on paranoia of having his (potential) London concert performances recorded without authorisation

and illegally distributed abroad. The creative machinations employed to overcome his fears so that he could confidently appear in the capital originated with two main players, the BBC's music executive Owen Mase (a real hero throughout the story) and the legendary impresario and EMI record producer Fred Gaisberg. One of the highlights of the book is the reproduction, in full, of a memorandum circulated by Mase (on the recommendation of Lord Reith), regarding his protracted adventures in pursuit of Toscanini for the second of three concert series with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the one for 1937. And there's the lead-up to the two-concert Brahms symphony cycle with the Philharmonia at the Royal Festival Hall, not to mention detailed commentary on the performances and a highly revealing appendix on Toscanini, Brahms, Fritz Steinbach and various of Steinbach's pupils. So, an unreserved recommendation for Dymant, whose beautifully styled prose is a joy to read and whose extensive research can only serve to enhance our understanding of this towering figure. Civetta offers a generalised introduction, personal, yes, but lacking in critical gravitas, which is what Dymant offers us in spades. **Rob Cowan**

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Iconic conductors

Blockbuster box-sets from the EMI vaults by Sir Colin Davis, Eugen Jochum and Carl Schuricht

Although viewed nowadays as a grand maestro – perhaps *the* grand maestro – among British conductors, **Sir Colin Davis** as a young man was a veritable dynamo, both in opera and orchestral repertoire. His early LPs enjoyed much popularity at the time and it's good to see EMI devote an 'Icon' set to recordings that Davis made with the Sinfonia of London, the Philharmonia and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

All date from the period 1959–63, and include an imposing account of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (with Sir Ralph Richardson narrating in English) and a version of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* with Yehudi Menuhin (viola) – possibly the musical highlight of the set – that still lays claim to being the best post-Koussevitzky version. Mozart symphonies, overtures and the Oboe Concerto (with Leon Goossens) are alert without sounding rushed;

'The Beethoven scowl, the fist and the heart – all are vividly implied'

there are nicely phrased Rossini overtures, and a Beethoven Seventh, long available as one of the only stereo 'Concert Classics' LPs, which with its sense of joyful engagement still justifies the critical accolades that helped cement its high reputation. Other works featured include the recording of Sir Michael Tippett's Piano Concerto that is also included in EMI's John Ogdon 'Icon' box (see next page).

Two further sets that warrant serious attention are devoted to major German conductors. The **Eugen Jochum** 'Icon'

collection is especially valuable in that it grants collectors a renewed opportunity to acquire complete Brahms and Beethoven symphony cycles that were taped here in London during the 1970s, the former with the London Philharmonic, the latter with the LSO. Sound-wise, there can be no grounds for complaint: textures are full and well balanced, the range of dynamics impressively wide and definition is for the most part all that one would wish for.

As to the performances, which are generally speaking sleek and very well played, Jochum habitually phrased with an ear for malleable lines, unlike Furtwängler (with whom he has often been compared, wrongly in my view), whose interpretative freedoms were more the result of insights into harmonic structure. Similarities between the two were relatively superficial, with Jochum playing the urbane sage to Furtwängler's rough-hewn god.

Many readers will know that Jochum had already recorded all the symphonic repertoire featured in this set for DG – the EMI Dresden Bruckner cycle is also included – and I was occasionally aware that certain of his earlier versions have the edge in terms of freshness and spontaneity. Still, these later recordings are more generous with repeats and we're also given deeply devotional Munich recordings of Bach's Mass in B minor and Mozart's *Coronation Mass*.

The **Carl Schuricht** 'Icon' set is devoted exclusively to Beethoven (a mostly mono complete cycle with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra) and Bruckner (Symphonies Nos 3, 8 and 9 with the Vienna Philharmonic, all in stereo). Where Jochum is the lofty sophisticate, Schuricht might be thought of as a Spencer

Tracy of the rostrum: he tells it as it is, with no frills and no obvious desire to convey anything other than the score's evidence. Of course this could, in principle, lead to playing safe; but Schuricht's admirably direct approach, allied to the rustic sound of a vintage French orchestra (I love those tangy woodwinds) is in a word 'Beethovenian'. The scowl, the fist and the heart – all are vividly implied and the stereo recording of the Ninth (with Gottlob Frick a magnificent bass soloist), a truly gripping production from start to finish, is surely the cycle's crowning glory.

The Bruckner symphonies again marry energy with integrity, their appeal as much in the profound simplicity of Schuricht's approach as in the frequent beauty of the orchestral playing. As with the Beethoven symphonies (or most of them), there are other Schuricht recordings versions available, many of them live, but none sound better and as an introduction to the honest art of a great if still significantly under-appreciated conductor, this 'Icon' set is pretty well ideal. All the 'Icon' transfers are excellent.

THE RECORDINGS



Colin Davis
The Early Recordings
EMI Icon © 463989-2



Eugen Jochum
The Complete EMI Recordings
EMI Icon © (20 discs) 464004-2



Carl Schuricht
The Complete EMI Recordings
EMI Icon © 623379-2



Urbane sage: Eugen Jochum in 1975

Magic Wand

Günter Wand's conducting style was nearer to Schuricht than to Jochum. Again, the underlying message is of art that conceals art, in other words a master at the helm whose main objective is to ensure that what we hear is what he sees on the page.

There are numerous Wand recordings of Bruckner's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies. These two with the NDR SO, from 1996 and 1995 respectively, relate a familiarly stern but compassionate view of Bruckner, the Fifth in particular benefiting from brass and timpani that compound the sense of mounting power. As ever with Wand, the excitement of listening lies in the inevitability of the symphonic arguments, something that is especially true in both finales.

Wand was nothing if not consistent. His RCA/BMG cycle of Brahms symphonies from the early 1980s, also with the NDR SO, is remarkably similar to these performances from 1990/92, both tempo-wise and in overall mood. Take the opening of the First, which flies off at a terrific lick but that once into its stride admits a wealth of subtle tempo variation. That fast opening makes its point and by the time we have completed our journey we realise that in Wand's view, *un poco sostenuto* applies not to the timpani's healthy heartbeat but to the soaring lines above it.

Profil has already granted us access to Wand's relatively brisk but imaginative way with Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (in Ravel's orchestration, with the Deutsches SO Berlin), a rendition which, like this NDR alternative, lacks any suggestion

of pompousness, while the Tchaikovsky First Concerto with Jorge Bolet outlaws temperamental excess, though, to be honest, I wouldn't always want to be kept quite this far from the score's passionate soul. A fine, well-groomed performance all the same.

THE RECORDING



Günter Wand Edition Bruckner, Brahms, Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky
Profil (M) (S) PH12043

Ogdon on record

When **John Ogdon** was taken from us at the age of 52 we lost one of music's great message boys, someone with an ear for big musical news that others were either too wary or too preoccupied to report. But although Ogdon gave us impassioned, unexpurgated statements of Busoni's multifaceted Piano Concerto and Ronald Stevenson's dazzlingly eventful *Passacaglia on DSCH*, not to mention a plethora of 20th-century British piano works that no one else had recorded (including some of his own), it's easy to forget that he could also be top-notch in standard repertoire. I'm thinking of the Liszt Sonata, where his ruggedly straightforward approach doesn't preclude one of the most sensitive accounts of the coda I've ever heard, or selected Chopin pieces, especially the rumbustious D major Mazurka, Op 33 No 2, and the Third Scherzo, where he brings great introspection to bear before the final dramatic flourish. Ogdon's Rachmaninov, although often sensitive, never shuns inclement weather (both sets

of *Etudes-tableaux* are included plus the Second Concerto) and he offers a warmly felt and refreshingly unaffected account of the Tchaikovsky B flat minor Concerto.

But I suspect that for many it will be Ogdon as piano adventurer who provides the biggest draw here, with repertoire that ranges, in addition to Bartók and the aforementioned Davies), to Dukas's sizeable Sonata, Dutilleux and Messiaen, and ending with a platter of sweetmeats ranging from Ibert's *Le petit âne blanc* to Sinding's *Rustle of Spring*. It's a remarkable feast and although Ogdon himself is the star of the show, that was surely never his intention. The music itself always comes first.

THE RECORDING



John Ogdon
Legendary British Virtuoso
EMI Icon (S) (M) 704637-2

The Ferras legacy

Another tragic loss to music, also in the 1980s, was the French violinist **Christian Ferras**, a victim of severe depression who took his own life at the age of 49. Ferras's ripe, emotive tone and expressive style more vividly resembled the playing of his one-time mentor Georges Enescu than any other violinist of his time, excepting perhaps the young Menuhin.

Discovery Records' import of a handsome 10-disc DG set called 'L'art de Christian Ferras' is an ideal opportunity for collectors to catch up with some of the loveliest violin records of the past 50 years. Included here are two Mozart sonatas (K305 and K376) that have never been released on CD before, as well as two Mozart concertos (No 3, K216, and 'No 6', K268) under Karl Münchinger. Also new to CD are Serge Nigg's First Concerto (with Charles Bruck conducting), Beethoven's two violin Romances under Leopold Ludwig, Bach's Violin Sonata, BWV1016, with Céline Chailley-Richez and early recordings of Kreisler's *Praeludium and Allegro* and Sarasate's *Romanza andaluza*.

I had quite forgotten the beauties of Ferras's Bach concertos under Karajan, not to mention concertos by Beethoven, Brahms and Sibelius, all of them characterised by a high degree of expressive refinement. Add works by Ravel, Chausson, Honegger, Debussy and Fauré and you have an essential supplement to Ferras's equally desirable EMI legacy. Utterly unmissable.

THE RECORDING



L'art de Christian Ferras
DG/Discovery (S) (M) 480 6655

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Martinů beyond the symphonies

There is more to Bohuslav Martinů than his justly celebrated six symphonies. Further exploration of this composer's voluminous output will surely pay handsome rewards, argues **David Gutman**



Bohuslav Martinů: a composer whose works celebrated iridescent colour in an age of battleship grey

So you've explored Jiří Bělohlávek's *Gramophone* Award-winning set of the symphonies (Onyx, 10/11). Where to next? If you've read this far you won't have been fazed by an elusive mode of address which has little truck with Austro-German developmental norms, makes naked borrowings from the usual 20th-century suspects and seems obsessed by a Moravian cadence which today's listeners hear as coming straight out of Janáček's *Taras Bulba*. Gone are the days when a *Gramophone* critic could describe *The Frescoes* as an 'inflated, overscored, thick and graceless pudding', as Lionel Salter

did in April 1959. Still, with 400-plus Martinů scores in every genre the choice remains bamboozling. There's some way to go before any of us can call ourselves Martinů specialists!

This is music that insists on moving forward in a period of (critically approved) stasis, celebrating iridescent colour in an age of battleship grey. It cleaves to tonality but in its own way, alighting as if by accident on pockets of intense feeling, nostalgic mementos for a time of blunted sensibility. Not for nothing is Martinů's magnum opus a dreamlike operatic adaptation where the true love we all seek exists only in our dreams:

surreal displacements were as central to Martinů's life as they were to Picasso's.

Elsewhere, the seemingly contradictory resort to spiritual tropes and ironic distancing must owe something to an extraordinary childhood spent living atop the church tower of Polička, where his father, a cobbler, doubled as watchman. Add in a prematurely post-modern penchant for repetition and whirling kaleidoscopic textures and we have a non-aligned idiom at once traditional and oddly prescient. A sonic surrealism which can also tug at the heartstrings with that critically undervalued gift of melody. **G**



10 Le jazz (1928)
Lubomír Pánek Singers,
Prague Symphony Orchestra /
Zbyněk Vostřák
Supraphon (M) SU3058-2 (7/73^R)

Martinů found his feet compositionally and emotionally not in Prague but in the Paris of the 1920s, and this useful collection of 'Works Inspired by Jazz and Sport' includes several pieces inspired by the vernacular music that was all the rage. While the Charleston from *La revue de cuisine* (1927) remains Martinů's unluckiest hit, don't hesitate to sample this poker-faced, insidiously memorable Paul Whiteman parody.



5 Double Concerto (1938)
Josef Růžička pf Jan Bouše
timp Prague Radio SO /
Charles Mackerras
Supraphon (M) SU3276-2 (7/85^R); (M) (S) SU4042-2

Martinů perfected a chugging neo-Baroque idiom that hit harder with his homeland under threat of dismemberment and his love life in turmoil. Mackerras is crisp and impassioned in his second recording of a super-concentrated Paul Sacher commission which sounds more like Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* than the work of Martinů's French contemporaries.



5 Field Mass (1939)
Ivan Kusnjér bar Czech PO
and Choir / Jiří Bělohlávek
Chandos (F) CHAN9138 (5/93)
Difficult times called forth a flurry

of overtly emotive, strongly individualised scores, this one anything but claustrophobic in Chandos's typically capacious sonics. Ranging men's voices against 'outdoor' wind, percussion, piano and harmonium, resources to which an active military unit might conceivably have access, there is, objectively speaking, 'not much there', yet, just as you're about to lose interest, some magical sonority or poignant folk memory breaks the surface.



7 Violin Concerto No 2 (1943)
Josef Suk vn
Czech PO / Václav Neumann
Supraphon (M) SU3967-2 (9/09)

In his American exile Martinů skilfully recalibrated the neo-Classical treadmill, achieving worldly success such as eluded other émigrés, through a sequence of occasionally formulaic symphonies and concertos. The present example is 'second-tier' Martinů, Paul Bowles likening the soloist to 'an annoying insect whose sound the orchestra sometimes manages to chase away'. But if this music needs the advocacy of a master violinist, it certainly gets it here.



5 Toccata e due canzoni (1946)
Basel Chamber Orchestra /
Christopher Hogwood
Arte Nova (M) 74321 86236-2 (1/02)

At the peak of his professional career, Martinů fell from a balcony and nearly died. Recovery was slow. By the time he might theoretically have returned to Prague, the Communists had seized power there and his personal life had become more than usually fraught, leaving him resigned to further wanderings. Capping the eerie, proto-minimalist portions completed before the incident, the third section is less focused.



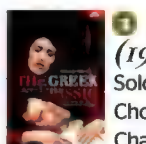
5 Les fresques de Piero della Francesca (1955)
Czech PO / Karel Ančerl
Supraphon (M) SU3684-2 (8/60^R)
Eventually Martinů found a way

to reprocess the dizzy spells and the buzzing noises inside his head, melding them into a new form of address. Repatriated to Czechoslovakia in fine style (and dated early stereo) for Ančerl's classic recording, the opulent *Frescoes*, like the yet more Debussyan *Parables* (1957) with which they are paired here, develop the Sixth Symphony's looser, fantastical dream-logic, juxtaposing dense masses of colourised sound with abruptly attenuated lines.



4 Rhapsody-Concerto (1952)
Tabea Zimmermann va
Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne /
James Conlon
Capriccio (F) 71053

Another tendency of 'late' Martinů is a simultaneous and apparently contradictory simplification of style. Soviet-dominated Czechoslovakia would discover that choral cantatas such as *The Opening of the Wells* (1955) sat perfectly well with the state's 'realist' aesthetic, but instrumental works like the formally meandering *Rhapsody-Concerto* encode a nostalgia no less potent for being abstract in nature.



1 The Greek Passion (1954-7, rev 1957-9)
Soloists; Czech Philharmonic
Chorus, Brno State PO /
Charles Mackerras
Supraphon (M) (S) 10 3611-2 (12/81^R);
(M) (S) SU4042-2; (F) DVD SU7014-9 (3/08)

This plain-speaking tale of 'Christ Crucified' spotlights the plight of the refugee and the inadequate response of organised religion. Mackerras recorded his dedicated account soon after piloting its first UK production by Welsh National Opera in 1981. The DVD, filmed subsequently, is more problematic, with actors miming to the recording.

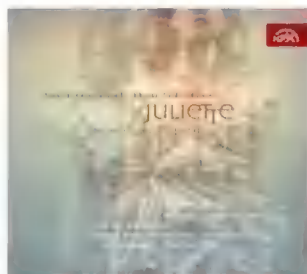


5 Chamber Music (1937-45)
Agata Igras-Sawicka fl
Bartłomiej Nizioł vn Marcin
Zdunik vc Mariusz Rutkowski pf
Dux (F) DUX0768 (A/11)

Martinů's considerable catalogue of chamber music has a string-quartet cycle at its core, but his lighter side is delightfully represented by this recent, well-recorded disc of pieces involving flute. The composer could be relied upon to turn out bouncy, idiomatic fare for any instrument, music that is a delight to play if not always as compelling for the listener. As here, the slow movements tend to go deeper.

1 Three Fragments from the opera Juliette

Soloists; Czech PO / Charles Mackerras
Supraphon (F) SU3994-2 (6/09)



Julietta (or *Juliette*), in which a travelling bookseller is haunted by the dream-memory of a girl singing at her window in a faraway town, is the ultimate example of Martinů's tendency to traverse a landscape without making 'progress'. Reflecting on the premature death of his own ideal woman, Vítězlava Kaprálová, Martinů was tinkering with the French version to the very end. Although Richard Jones's splendid production has played in Paris, Geneva and London, there's no DVD and the complete recordings come in Czech or German. Mackerras's Francophone selection provides the best entrée.



Visit the Gramophone Player at
gramophone.co.uk to sample
an excerpt from Martinů's Three
Fragments from the opera Juliette

ARE YOU A SPECIALIST?

Share your top recordings of Martinů works beyond the symphonies on the forum at gramophone.co.uk, where you can also suggest forgotten violin works by the likes of Henryk Wieniawski (right), the subject of next month's specialist, Duncan Druce.





Musical gift: MARION'S RICKERT
setlings culminated in a wedding
Messt for his wife Alma

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Mahler's most personal love song

When Mahler presented 'Liebst du um Schönheit' as a gift to his new wife Alma, it became the fifth and last of the **Rückert-Lieder** – a collection of songs based on Friedrich Rückert's poems. **Richard Wigmore** attempts to choose the ultimate recording – a Mahlerian challenge if ever there was one...

As Mörike was to Wolf, and Heine to Schumann, so Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866) – poet, philologist, orientalist – was to Mahler. The composer identified profoundly with the directness and refined sensibility of his verses, declaring that 'after *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* I could not compose anything but Rückert – this is lyric poetry from the source, all else is lyric poetry of a derivative kind'. Apart from the earliest, 'Um Mitternacht' ('At midnight'), all the so-called *Rückert-Lieder* were written in the idyllic lakeside setting of Maiernigg in Carinthia, where Mahler had built a summer villa as a refuge from the habitual turbulence of the Viennese opera season. Four of the songs were completed, in both piano and orchestral versions, by August 1901. A fifth, 'Liebst du um Schönheit' ('If you love for beauty's sake'), followed a year later, as a gift to his new bride, Alma Schindler. It is Mahler's sole overt love song, and the only one of the *Rückert-Lieder* he never orchestrated – doubtless because of its intensely personal significance. When a plausibly Mahlerian orchestral version by the Leipzig musician-cum-critic Max Puttmann appeared in 1916, Alma, predictably, protested.

In their orchestral guise, four of the *Rückert-Lieder* were premiered at a sold-out concert in Vienna that many *Lieder* lovers might be tempted to nominate as the greatest ever showcase of new songs: a 'Lieder recital with orchestra' – itself a revolutionary concept – in January 1905 that also included the premieres

of the *Kindertotenlieder* and settings from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Crucially, Mahler chose the small Brahms-Saal of the Musikverein so that the songs could be performed 'in the manner of chamber music', in an apt acoustic.

There is no hint in the *Rückert-Lieder* of Mahler as purveyor of orchestral gigantism. Except for the brooding, starkly scored 'Um Mitternacht' (wind and brass, without strings), these are his most lyrical songs. Mahler matches their subjective intimacy with orchestration of vocal eloquence, at once intricate and exquisitely delicate: in the gossamer textures (no cellos or basses) of 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft! ('I breathed a gentle fragrance!') that prefigure the ravishing chinoiserie of *Das Lied von der Erde*; or the veiled, plangent contrapuntal weave of cor anglais, clarinets, horns and muted strings in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' ('I have lost touch with the world'), on the familiar Romantic theme of withdrawal into a secluded world of love, art and nature.

For economic reasons, concert-goers hear the *Rückert-Lieder* far more often with piano than with orchestra. Yet like the *Wunderhorn* songs and the *Kindertotenlieder*, their conception is essentially orchestral. Once experienced, it is hard to forgo the keening cor anglais in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', the mournful clarinets, oboe d'amore and nocturnal horns – and the final symphonic blaze – of 'Um Mitternacht', or the *con sordino* murmurings of 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!'. However

sympathetic the performers, the piano versions tend to stand in relation to the orchestral as a pen-and-ink sketch does to a painting. So although recorded performances of the *Rückert-Lieder* are divided evenly between keyboard and orchestra, I shall concentrate primarily on the orchestral versions, taking in the pick of the keyboard-accompanied recordings en route. My self-imposed rule is that discs must include at least the four songs that Mahler orchestrated himself, which means no more than a rueful glance at Kathleen Ferrier's intensely felt 1952 performance of three songs with Bruno Walter and the VPO (Alto ALC1120).

Although Mahler's two chosen soloists at the pioneering 1905 *Lieder-Abend mit Orchester* were baritones, most recordings feature mezzo-sopranos, the voice type we now think of as quintessentially Mahlerian. The published edition opens with the *scherzo* of the set, 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' ('Do not look into my songs' – Mahler hated anyone prying into his unfinished works), followed by 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!'. Then come the longest, most profound songs, 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' and 'Um Mitternacht', with 'Liebst du um Schönheit' as a radiant envoi. This ordering can work in performance, though many singers prefer to end with the two 'big' songs, or to separate them with 'Liebst du um Schönheit'.

Whatever their chosen order, any singer tackling the *Rückert-Lieder* must be attuned to their tenderness and intimacy, while conductors

need an acute feeling for instrumental balance and pacing, not least in 'Um Mitternacht', with its many shifts of metre and tempo.

On a Naxos recording, **Cord Garben** draws some sensitive playing from the Hanover Radio Philharmonic. But baritone **Hidenori Komatsu** is unsubtle, often too loud, and lacks a true, 'bound' *legato*, a *sine qua non* in these songs. The lumpy opening phrase of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' alone makes this a non-starter.

Dietrich Henschel has his bright, high baritone under far better control, while the luminous textures of a slimmed-down Hallé Orchestra under Kent Nagano are surely close to Mahler's ideal. He is tenderly confiding in 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!; and he vividly catches both the existential questioning at the opening of 'Um Mitternacht' (where the oboe d'amore and clarinet slides give full value to Mahler's eerie night-bird calls) and the triumphant affirmation of faith at the end.

With incisive diction and a free-ringing top register, Henschel holds his own without strain against Mahler's brass chorale. Only 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' slightly disappoints. Ushered in by one of the most eloquent of cor anglais soloists, it's beautifully paced, with an ardently flowing middle section. But with a hint of tension in the tone, Henschel misses the ultimate Mahlerian *Innigkeit*.

At his peak in 1963, **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau** distils an otherworldly spirituality in this song, inspired by the sentient, deep-toned playing of the Berlin Philharmonic under Karl Böhm. Fischer-Dieskau sees everything and exaggerates nothing. 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' is gently whimsical, 'Um Mitternacht' predictably magnificent, whether in the hushed, fearful opening, the lamenting quality of tone at the disconsolate 'Es hat kein Lichtgedanken mir Trost gebracht', or the final affirmation, warm and noble, without bombast. His responses to text and harmonic flux are specific, never generalised. Only 'Ich atmet' einen

linden Duft!' is controversial. Fischer-Dieskau's caressing *mezza voce* is matched by playing of exquisite delicacy – 'very tender and inward', indeed. But can Mahler have intended the song to unfold at this trance-like tempo?

Caught 'live' with the VPO under Zubin Mehta at the 1967 Salzburg Festival, **Fischer-Dieskau** takes 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!' more flowingly, though the pinched, nasal tone of the Vienna oboe at this period is a taste I've never acquired. Unlike the Böhm recording, the baritone here includes 'Liebst du um Schönheit', sung ardently if with slightly queasy *rubato*. Fischer-Dieskau completists will want this, though apart from the extra song, I see no reason for preferring it to his BPO studio recording. 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' is still ineffably moving (I hope they throttled the cougher in the orchestral coda). But in 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' and 'Um Mitternacht' he now sounds over-strenuous, jabbing unsuspecting consonants. The orchestra suffers in the recorded balance.

KEYBOARD EXCURSION

Fischer-Dieskau is even more prone to exaggeration in his 1978 recording of all five *Rückert-Lieder* in their piano versions. Though the nap on his tone has begun to wear, his breath control remains miraculous, effortlessly encompassing phrases that most singers break into two. He now finds new shades of desolation and tenderness in 'Um Mitternacht', abetted by Daniel Barenboim's vividly 'orchestrated' accompaniment. It is the three lighter songs that provoke misgivings. All receive the full F-D treatment. 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!', so magical in the Böhm recording, now shows bulges in the line. 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' is neurotically fussy, while the sudden explosions on 'Sonne' and 'Meerfrau' in 'Liebst du um Schönheit' sound hectoring rather than ecstatic.

For all Fischer-Dieskau's probing mastery, the most satisfying versions with piano come

from three younger baritones, all favouring mobile tempos. **Roman Trekel**, with Burkhard Kehring, uses his firm, dark resonance and incisive diction to magnificent effect in 'Um Mitternacht', and shapes 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!' with caressing tenderness. The timbre of his voice makes 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' more elegiac than usual, marred here and there by a touch of flatness.

Stephan Genz is even more touching. If he lacks the ideal weight for the climax of 'Um Mitternacht', his gentle, companionable baritone and verbal sensitivity give consistent pleasure. Genz sings 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' lightly, confidentially, with a smile in the tone, matched by the delicacy and point of Roger Vignoles's accompaniment. 'Liebst du um Schönheit' is flowing and simple, in extreme contrast to Fischer-Dieskau; and with seamless *legato* and perfect control of soft dynamics, he gives a mesmeric performance of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'.

Equally rapt and inward here is **Christian Gerhaher** in symbiotic partnership with Gerold Huber, who finds an ideal ebb and flow for the song's keyboard interludes. With his minute yet unexaggerated verbal response, Gerhaher charts each shade of spiritual desolation in 'Um Mitternacht' – placed as the recital's centrepiece – and uses the robust core of his baritone for a ringing final affirmation of faith. He and Huber catch the fun as well as the pungency of 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder'. Overall, Gerhaher is as touching and dramatically involved as Genz, but even wider-ranging in tone colour and expression.

Among a handful of versions with mezzo and piano, **Marie-Nicole Lemieux** – so often memorable in Handel and Vivaldi – sings here with a monochrome severity. The more communicative **Ann Murray** is lucidly partnered by Malcolm Martineau. 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!' and 'Liebst du um Schönheit', the final 'dich lieb' ich immerdar' blissfully savoured, are especially lovely; and her slightly



THE BARITONE CHOICE

Fischer-Dieskau, BPO / Böhm
DG (M) ② 477 5556GM3

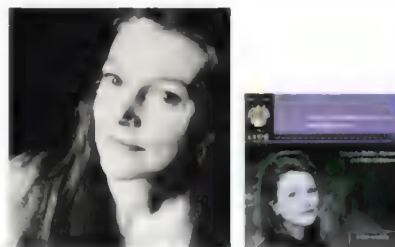
Some will regret the omission of 'Liebst du um Schönheit', but Fischer-Dieskau combines beauty of tone, Mahlerian understanding and a spiritual quality.



THE MODERN CHOICE

Kožená, BPO/ Rattle
DG (F) 479 0065GH

In partnership with Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic, Kožená sings with youthful vocal radiance and an individual response to text and verbal music.



THE PIANO CHOICE

Hunt Lieberson, Vignoles
Wigmore Hall Live (M) 0013

From a trancelike 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft! to a serene 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', Hunt Lieberson's performances are lit with an inner glow.

strained tone at *mezzo-forte* and above somehow enhances the agonised questioning in 'Um Mitternacht'.

Even more moving is **Lorraine Hunt Lieberson**, with Roger Vignoles, recorded before a digitally silenced Wigmore Hall audience. She brought an almost unbearable emotional vulnerability to everything she sang. It is impossible to banish awareness of her premature death when listening to 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', in which she distils an unearthly mix of poignancy and spiritual serenity. No one else quite matches her spontaneous yet contained passion in 'Liebst du um Schönheit'; and she vindicates her measured tempos in 'Um Mitternacht' (holding back where Mahler prescribes 'flowing') with her haunting concentration, making the song a starkly intimate confession of the soul.

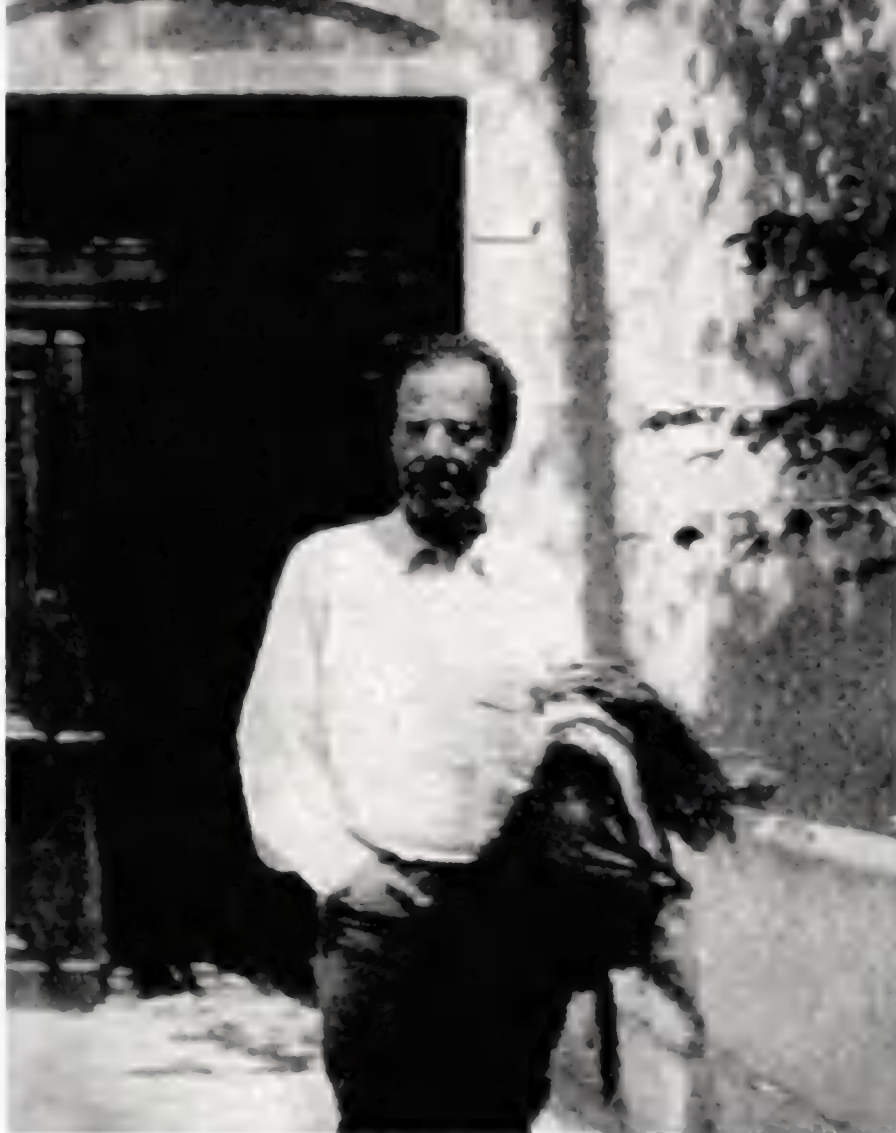
MEZZO AND ORCHESTRA

Like Verdi, Mahler was famed for choosing singers – sometimes controversially – for their expressive power rather than vocal beauty. No mezzo in the *Rückert-Lieder* has a richer or more vibrant voice than **Marilyn Horne**, but she never remotely suggests a true Mahlerian inwardness. She makes a meal of 'Liebst du um Schönheit', and, fatally, can't resist opening up on the high phrases in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'. Her determinedly sung 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' might be summed up as 'Don't mess with me'.

Barnardette Greevy's warm contralto tones had lost their bloom by the time she recorded the songs in 1994. There are touching things here, including a gently musing 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!', but too much that is effortful.

Recorded at a concert with the San Francisco SO, **Susan Graham** combines a rounded beauty of tone with a vivid sense of character: say, in her excitable 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' – 'very lively', as Mahler demands – or the sensuous reverie of 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!'. She is impressive, too, in the spiritual drama of 'Um Mitternacht', where Michael Tilson Thomas skilfully negotiates the tricky gear shifts. But 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' is too forthright and too indulgent, with singer and conductor taking Mahler's *zurückhaltend* ('held back') as a cue for ceaseless *ritardandi*, even when he specifies 'flowing'.

With a cooler, less creamy tone, **Katarina Karnéus** is more *innig* here. But her ultra-slow speed – necessitating a break in the opening phrase – suggests a soul weighted with sorrow rather than a blissful withdrawal from the world. A few raw top notes apart, Karnéus judges the three lighter songs nicely, not least a playful 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder', enhanced by the transparent chamber sonorities that Susanna Mälkki conjures from the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. Singer, woodwind and horns combine in



Summer respite: Mahler enjoys a walk while staying at his country villa in Maiernigg, Carinthia, in 1905

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS

- 1963** Fischer-Dieskau: BPO / **Böhm**
1967 Fischer-Dieskau: VPO / **Mehta**
1969 Baker: New Philh Orch / **Barbirolli**

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

- DG (M) ② 477 5556GM3
 Orfeo (M) C336 931B
 EMI (B) 566981-2 (2/68: 7/99); (S) ⑤ 208087-2;
 (S) ⑩ 457767-2; (S) ⑩ 608985-2
1974 Ludwig: BPO / **Karajan** DG (B) ② 457 716-2GOR2 (12/98); (S) ② 453 0402GTA2; (B) ② 469 304-2GP2
1978 Fischer-Dieskau: Barenboim *pf* EMI (B) 567556-2; (F) 476780-2; (S) ⑩ 456352-2
1978 Horne: Los Angeles PO / **Mehta** Decca Eloquence (B) 442 8287; Decca (S) ⑩ 478 0165DC11
1993 Von Otter: North German Rad SO / **Gardiner** DG (F) 439 928-2GH
1994 Greevy: Ireland Nat SO / **Furst** Naxos (S) 8 554156
1995 Komatsu: Hanover Rad PO / **Garben** Naxos (S) 8 554164
1995/1996 Fassbaender: Deutsches SO Berlin / **Chailly** Decca (S) ② 473 725-2DF2
1998 Hunt Lieberson: Vignoles *pf* Wigmore Hall Live (M) 0013 (6/07)
2000 Lemieux: Blumenthal *pf* Cypres (F) CYP8605
2001 Henschel: Hallé Orch / **Nagano** Apex (S) 2564 67538-9
2003 Genz: Vignoles *pf* Hyperion (F) CDA67392
2004 Trekel: Kehrung *pf* Berlin Classics (F) 001742BC
2005 Murray: Martineau *pf* Avie (F) AV2077 (2/06)
2008 Schäfer: Deutsches SO Berlin / **Eschenbach** Capriccio (F) CAP5026 (11/10)
2009 Gerhaher: Huber *pf* RCA Red Seal (M) 88697 56773-2
2010 Graham: San Francisco SO / **Tilson Thomas** Avie/SFS Media (F) ② 82193 60036-2 (11/10)
2010 Karnéus: Gothenburg SO / **Mälkki** BIS (F) ② BIS-SACD1600 (10/11)
2010 Kožená: Lucerne Fest Orch / **Abbado** EuroArts (F) ② 205 7988 (2/11); (F) ② 205 7984
2011 Kožená: BPO / **Rattle** DG (F) 479 0065GH (7/12)

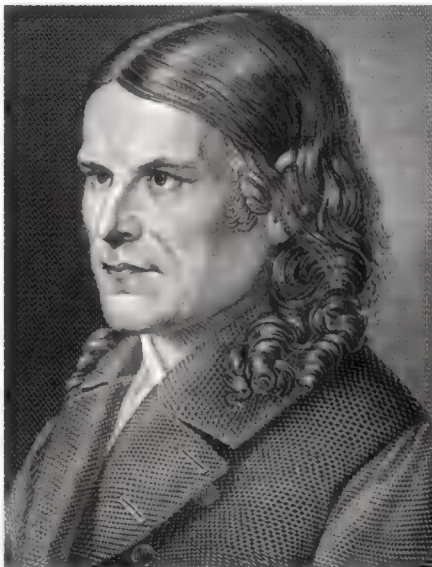
anxious, intimate colloquy in 'Um Mitternacht'. With the turn to the major key at the words 'I cast my mind outwards, beyond the dark barriers', Karnéus and the players respond to Mahler's indication *zart* – tender, delicate – where many singers just get louder.

Christine Schäfer, the sole soprano in this survey, gives performances that will fascinate or repel, according to taste. Her voice is not always ideally steady, and high notes can glare. Mahler's veiled colourings are inevitably brightened when songs are transposed upwards. In 'Ich atmet einen linden Duft!', oboe and first horn are replaced by flute and clarinet: easier to play smoothly in *alt*, but compromising Mahler's orchestral palette. Schäfer sparkles in the opening 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder'. 'Um Mitternacht' is neurotic, disturbed, as if soprano and conductor Christoph Eschenbach are already eyeing the Expressionism of Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. But I found both 'Liebst du um Schönheit' and 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' well-nigh unbearable, the former inflated into a *Tristan*-esque wallow, the latter drawn out yet anything but *rubig*.

A relief, then, to turn to two Mahler singers of an older generation. **Christa Ludwig's** velvet mezzo and sumptuous *legato* are movingly heard in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', placed first. 'Um Mitternacht' has a sombre, hieratic majesty – the antithesis of Schäfer. From the opening cor anglais solo, Herbert von Karajan coaxes playing of sculpted finesse from the Berlin Philharmonic, though the large body of strings threatens to overwhelm the singer in 'Liebst du um Schönheit'. Ludwig's artistry and vocal mastery are irrefutable. Yet in the lighter songs she is too much the grande dame to charm and touch: 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' comes across as a stern reprimand, 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!' as a solemnly impersonal statement.

Brigitte Fassbaender, eloquently partnered by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Riccardo Chailly, is less impeccable vocally (her deep-bronze tone can discolour on high notes) but far more involving. Where Ludwig relates, Fassbaender lives each song, intensely. She is never merely comfortable. 'Liebst du um Schönheit', taken swiftly, is ardent and outgoing, utterly devoid of sentimentality. She spins a caressing line in 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!', while both the larger songs are magnificent: in the fearful unease at the opening of 'Um Mitternacht', the shocking stab of despair at the melisma on 'entscheiden', or the otherworldliness of the line 'I am dead to the world's bustle' in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'.

With her lighter, more pellucid timbre, **Anne Sofie von Otter** matches Fassbaender in urgency of communication. She and the fine wind soloists of the NDR Symphony Orchestra under John Eliot Gardiner are exquisitely



Poet Friedrich Rückert: for Mahler, a pure lyrical source

delicate in 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!', and distil an ethereal serenity, very different from Fassbaender's bittersweet world-weariness, in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' – though I don't sense any quickening of the pulse, as specified by Mahler, at the section beginning 'Es ist mir auch gar nichts dargelegen'. In contrast to Fassbaender, 'Liebst du um Schönheit' is tender and intimate. If Von Otter lacks the ideal reserves of tone for 'Um Mitternacht', she compensates with her acute response to each phase of Mahler's dark night of the soul.

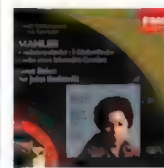
On an enterprisingly planned disc that juxtaposes the *Rückert-Lieder* with Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*, **Magdalena Kožená** combines still-youthful beauty and evenness of tone with intensity of expression. 'Liebst du um Schönheit' is surpassingly tender, with an exquisite floated *pianissimo* on the climactic 'Liebe'. Cushioned by the infinitely delicate playing of the Berlin Philharmonic under Simon Rattle, she exudes a rarefied, secretive bliss at the line 'and rest in a tranquil realm' near the close of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'. In 'Um Mitternacht', founded on a seamless *legato*, she vividly dramatises the desolate self-questioning. She and Rattle are careful never to let the song become statuesque, and build to a glowing climax, excited rather than grandiose.

Kožená is equally intense and involving on a DVD recording from the Lucerne Festival. A batonless Claudio Abbado conjures miracles of refinement from the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. Mahler's contrapuntal lines are fastidiously sifted. And has any orchestra ever sounded so magical in the transfigured *ppp* (Mahler's marking) coda of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'? I loved the shot of the Hoffnung-esque bass tuba in 'Um Mitternacht'. But what David Gutman, in his original review,

dubbed Kožená's 'wild-eyed gurning' does not take kindly to close-ups.

Forced to nominate a single version of the *Rückert-Lieder* with mezzo and orchestra, I should be hard-pushed to choose between Kožená, Von Otter and Fassbaender. For vocal radiance and touching vulnerability I should plump, just, for Kožená, with either Rattle or Abbado (perhaps with the picture turned off). But the version of these glorious songs that has moved me more than any other is the 1969 recording from **Janet Baker**, with the New Philharmonia Orchestra under John Barbirolli. With Baker at her vocal peak, this has justly become a classic. True, one or two tempos are slower than Mahler probably envisaged. Flute and clarinet replace oboe and horn in 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!', the brief violin solo in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' is played by violins *en masse*, and there's the odd audible edit. But it hardly matters when the playing and singing are so lovingly attuned to these most private of Mahler's songs.

In its burning directness and subtle feeling for atmosphere, epitomised by the fearful *pianissimo* before the final apotheosis, Baker's 'Um Mitternacht' has never been eclipsed. 'Liebst du um Schönheit' captivates with its candour and freshness, 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!' with its floating grace. And not even Fischer-Dieskau quite equalled Baker's self-communing *Innigkeit* in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', from the opening phrase, perfectly *ruhevoll* (peaceful) – as the composer asks – to the hushed, transfigured close. Mahler, who needed to escape from 'the world's bustle' in order to create, called this sublime song 'my very self'. In Baker's hypnotic performance you sense that the singer is revealing as much of herself as the composer. **G**



TOP CHOICE

Baker: New Philh Orch / Barbirolli
EMI © 566981-2

Tenderness, grace, impassioned directness, sublime Mahlerian inwardness: Janet Baker, in glorious voice, has them all, abetted by Barbirolli's loving, yet never indulgent, accompaniments. Baker's version of these songs is immensely moving.



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Transport of delight

Hannah Nepil visits Scotland to find mischievous musical happenings on a bus, in a stable and at a lighthouse



Three in a stable: Bolted's bizarre love triangle

We wondered why the bus had stopped. After all, the road ahead was empty; no technical fault had been reported; the driver seemed positively jolly. Yet here we were, at a standstill, in the middle of a deserted Aberdeenshire forest. Deserted, that is, except for one unkempt gent with a cello (later revealed to be the musician Matthew Sharp), who emerged from behind a tree and clambered noisily aboard. 'Thank you for saving my life!' he cried, before launching into a barely coherent narrative, accompanied by hysterical bursts of singing and cello-playing.

It was my first encounter with an opera-on-a-bus. But then, Aberdeen's Sound Festival – of which Sharp's *tour de force* formed just one part – delights in this sort of mischief. Founded in 2004, it provides up-and-coming composers with a playground for trying out new ideas, while injecting contemporary music into areas of north-east Scotland which don't tend to 'get past Sibelius', according to Pete Stollery, one of Sound's founders. This year the theme was site-specific opera, which is how I wound up on an all-day bus tour, encompassing a stable block in Aboyne and a lighthouse in Fraserburgh.

As with many experimental forums, the results were mixed: Pippa Murphy's stable-based *Bolted* – which sketches out a love triangle between a young girl, her boyfriend and her, um, horse – harnessed the power of suggestion to haunting effect, with a single cellist providing both the entire musical accompaniment and the role of the horse. Gareth Williams's *Last One Out*, on the other hand, failed to capitalise on the mystique of its lighthouse setting, lacking both musical and dramatic interest.

But then, if there's anything that this festival encourages us to expect, it's to expect nothing at all and to re-examine definitions often taken for granted. 'This weekend is very much about asking: what is opera?' says Fiona Robertson, the festival's director.

Similarly at Sonica, which I visited in Glasgow two weeks later, comfort zones were resolutely eschewed. This brand-new event – created by the producing art house Cryptic – blurs the boundaries between music, visual art and theatre, and defines itself by its lack

of definability. 'We don't favour artists who are already being supported, we look for those who stand out and don't quite fit into a category – music, theatre or visual art,' says Cathie Boyd, Cryptic's artistic director. 'There will always be a demand for the traditional Mozart concerts. The big opera houses will always be there. But there is also a hunger for this other area that is slightly left-field.'

'An unkempt gent with a cello clambered aboard before launching into hysterical bursts of singing and cello-playing'

While there was plenty in Sonica to satisfy that hunger, the highlight, for me, was *Bluebeard*, a 'digital opera' based on the same story as Bartók's masterpiece but with a completely different score, due, in part, to copyright issues. This virtuoso fusion of video projection, computer animation and recorded music – the creation of the Dutch ensemble 33 1/3 Collective – offered a level of fantastical detail that I've yet to see equalled in any opera house. But then, as I asked 33 1/3, would one call this an opera at all? 'We couldn't care less' was the general consensus.

The same question mark hovered over *Remember Me*. Billing itself as an 'opera inside a desk', complete with miniature model orchestra and interval refreshments (Turkish delight), Claudia Molitor's Cageian creation looked thrilling on paper. But the result was strangely elusive, like a much-anticipated guest who fails to show up. The same went for *Tales of Magic Realism: Part 2*. Sven Werner's attempt to generate the feeling of stepping inside a film was conceptually intriguing but made for tedious viewing.

Hit and miss as they were, Sound and Sonica did reveal one thing: for new-music aficionados in search of the truly outrageous, a ticket to Scotland is a worthwhile investment. Particularly if you happen to take the bus.

A female presence on the Fitelberg podium

Gavin Dixon attends the Fitelberg Conducting Competition in Poland, where women maestros make up half the finalists

Katowice in southern Poland is a city with a passion for orchestral conducting. The Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors takes place here and is the region's most important cultural event. For 10 days, huge posters bearing the competition's baton motif line the streets, newspapers carry regular updates and the concerts receive extensive television coverage.

The city's Filharmonia concert hall is undergoing renovation, so the 2012 competition was moved to the Szymanowski Academy of

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Music. That turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as the Academy has an excellent new concert hall of its own, with near-ideal acoustics. The students also took a great interest, ensuring large audiences at every session.

Conductor Antoni Wit chaired the jury. He is an enthusiastic advocate for the competition and hopes that it can benefit Polish music as much as it does the winning competitors. 'In the past, we in Poland have not done enough to promote our music,' Wit told me, 'so by including Polish works, we hope that more young conductors will approach this music.' Górecki and Kilar are among Katowice's most famous sons and the competition repertoire included works by both composers.

'Jury chairman Antoni Wit hopes the competition can benefit Polish music'

Despite the Polish focus, the Fitelberg is very much an international competition, drawing competitors from all over the world. Many candidates knew each other from previous encounters on the competition circuit and the atmosphere was one of friendly rivalry. Professional tensions will undoubtedly challenge these friendships in later years but at this early stage in their careers all benefit from strong mutual support.

Female conductors made a particularly strong impression this year, taking an unprecedented three of the six finalist positions. 'It is certainly a sign of the times,' says Wit. 'I am happy that women have done so well in this competition, as it may make it easier for ladies in the future to conduct.'

Marzena Diakun was the most successful female competitor, earning second place with a series of intelligent and finely crafted

The insider's guide

Gramophone selects January's unmissable musical events

3 London, Kings Place

La Nuova Musica, countertenor Robin Blaze and soprano Helen-Jane Howells perform a programme of Bach including his Cantata No 169 and Psalm 51 as part of the Kings Place 'Bach Unwrapped' series, which runs from December 30 to January 4. kingsplace.co.uk

5 Singapore, Esplanade Concert Hall

Krystian Zimerman makes his Singapore Symphony debut, performing Lutoslawski's Piano Concerto under conductor Lan Shui alongside Beethoven's Symphony No 7 and Dvořák's Suite in A major. sso.org.sg

5 Rome, Sala Santa Cecilia

The Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia conducted by Vasily Petrenko perform Debussy's *Printemps*, Rachmaninov's cantata *Spring* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* on January 5, 7 and 8. santacecilia.it

12 Shrewsbury, Lion Hall

The Dante Quartet present

'Quartet of Dreams', the second concert in their series dedicated to French chamber works, for the Shropshire Music Trust. On the programme are string quartets by Debussy, Haydn and Kodály. shropshiremusictrust.com

12 Niseko, Winter Music Festival

Members of the Australian Chamber Orchestra travel to Niseko in Japan for the fourth Winter Music Festival, running from January 12 to 14, combining concerts, skiing and fine food. aco.com.au

16 Birmingham, Town Hall

Tenor Ian Bostridge and pianist Julius Drake perform Britten's *Winter Words* as part of Birmingham's 'Britten 100' celebrations, alongside 12 songs from Schubert's *Winterreise* and Ives's 'Memories', 'Thoreau' and 'Remembrance'. Also appearing in Britten's works throughout the month are Ex Cathedra, Angela Hewitt and the Britten Sinfonia, and the CBSO. birminghambritten.co.uk



Flawless at the Fitolberg: the victorious conductor Daniel Smith

performances. But the most remarkable story of the week was the path to victory of Australian Daniel Smith. Luck was against him in the first round and he initially failed to qualify for the second. But a last-minute dropout allowed him to re-enter the competition. He made the most of his second chance and each of his subsequent performances was practically flawless. Smith's campaign came to an electrifying conclusion with the Capriccio from Lutoslawski's Concerto for Orchestra. Every cue in this complex score was given, every transition skilfully handled, and the performance sparked with life and energy. The audience had spent the day in heated debates about who would take the top prize but, from that point on, the competition had clearly found its winner. **G**

21 Chicago, Civic Opera House
Lyric Opera of Chicago presents Puccini's *La bohème*, running from January 21 to March 28. Taking the role of Mimì are Ana María Martínez throughout January and February, and Anna Netrebko in March. Dimitri Pittas stars as Rodolfo during January and February, passing the role to Joseph Calleja in March. lyricopera.org

26 Manchester, Bridgewater Hall
The BBC Philharmonic perform Bartók's ballet score *The Wooden Prince*, Oliver Knussen's *Flourish with Fireworks*, and Korngold's Violin Concerto with soloist Renaud Capuçon. bridgewater-hall.co.uk

31 Edinburgh, Usher Hall
The Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and director Andrew Litton kick off their UK tour in Edinburgh on January 31, travelling throughout the UK to Gateshead, Leeds, Warwick, Basingstoke, Manchester and Southend until February 7. On the programme are Delius's *On the Mountains*, Grieg's Piano Concerto with soloist Christian Ihle Hadland, Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Liszt's Second Piano Concerto with soloist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. usherhall.co.uk

EVENT OF THE MONTH

January 31

Madrid, Auditorio Nacional de Música

The National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, DC, under Christoph Eschenbach tour to Spain, Germany and France from January 31 to February 10, giving concerts in Madrid, Murcia, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Nuremberg, Frankfurt and Paris. On the programme are Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra and Piano Concerto No 2; Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture and *Grosse Fuge*; Brahms's Symphony No 2; Mozart's Violin Concerto No 5; and Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*. Joining the orchestra are violinist Julia Fischer and pianist Tzimon Barto. kennedy-center.org/nso/



Touring: Eschenbach and the NSO

Classics Direct

Gramophone Choice Recordings

Disc of the month

Beethoven	Symphonies Nos. 5 & 7	Eliot Gardiner	£11.00
Debussy	Pelléas et Mélisande (3cd)	Ingelbrecht	£18.00
Elgar	The 'Longed-for Light'	Wilson	£10.95
Fauré	Requiem (SACD)	Tenebrae, Short	£ 8.25
Handel	Finest Arias	Purves, Cohen	£10.00
Knussen	Autumnal	Knussen	£10.00
Prokofiev	Violin Concerto No. 2 etc.	Jansen, Jurowski	£10.75
Puccini	Tosca (DVD)	Gheorghiu, Pappano	£11.80
Vinci #	Artaserse (3cd)	Jaroussky, Fasolis	£17.50
	Nouveau Monde	Patricia Petibon	£10.75
	Plorer, Gemir, Crier	Guerber	£12.50
	Romantique	Elma Garanča	£10.75

Recent Recommended Releases

Bach JS	Cantatas Volume 52 (SACD)	Suzuki	£10.00
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What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them? The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you won't play them. So you are forced to share your living space with literally hundreds of cheap plastic boxes. CDs are a great way to listen to music but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore.

The Brennan JB7 is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs - and that's not all

It saves space and clutter and delivers near immediate access to an entire music collection. JB7 owners rediscover then fall in love with their music again simply because the Brennan makes it so accessible.

The Brennan also records from vinyl and cassette so you can enjoy your entire music collection but keep the originals in another room or retire them to the attic.

The face behind Brennan

Martin Brennan, who designed the JB7, has worked with Sir Clive Sinclair and Lord Alan Sugar and has designed over 20 silicon chips in his career. He was a real pioneer in the computer games industry - he played a central role in the design of the world's first 64 bit games computer.

Ever since CDs were invented Martin wanted a CD player that would hold his entire CD collection. He wanted something as simple to use as a light switch but at the same time something that would let him find a particular track without leaving the armchair.

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THIS MONTH I've been testing two systems with different approaches to streaming – Naim's slimline UnitiLite and Denon's D-F109DAB component system – and I review the best products covered in these pages during 2012.

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

JANUARY TEST DISCS



To show what a good system can achieve, Alison Balsom's 'Sound the Trumpet' set on EMI is a thrilling listen



The second in Paul Lewis's Schubert series for Harmonia Mundi: as compelling as it is rewarding in sonic terms

It's all about keeping your options open

2012 will be remembered as the year when streaming services went mainstream, says **Andrew Everard**



These days it seems just about every audio company is finding ways of offering more means of accessing music, and more choice to consumers.

Denon is the latest brand to add Spotify capability to its products, with its latest AV receivers and lifestyle systems offering access to either the basic free Spotify service or, with the payment of a subscription, the higher-resolution Spotify Premium. That's in addition to the huge range of internet radio stations on offer, plus of course the ability to download or rip purchased music and access that remotely: 2012 was the year when streaming services stopped being the preserve of those 'in the know', and went 'mainstream'.

Denon European Marketing Manager Achim Schulz says that 'millions of users are listening to their favourite tracks on their PC through Spotify. From now on, they will also be able to enjoy this huge music library through our new Denon AV receivers.'

Yamaha, meanwhile, has added a different streaming service to its receivers from the RX-V673 upwards: Napster is available on these models as a 30-day free trial and thereafter on subscription. The service offers access to 15m tracks plus hundreds of preprogrammed music channels, and the ability to build one's own 'radio station' based on personal music preferences.

Streaming of a different kind is on offer via **Roth Audio's** latest desktop radios, which have DAB/DAB+/FM radio reception plus the ability to accept Bluetooth wireless audio from suitable smartphones, tablets and computers, allowing any audio available on those devices to be played through the radios. Two models are available: the mono DBT-100 sells for £109, while the stereo DBT-300 is £149. Both also have 3.5mm stereo analogue inputs plus a USB socket from which to charge portable devices.

Internet or network music streaming is also possible using the new IX from **Chord Electronics**, which is part of a redesigned MX range also including the SX stereo amplifier, TX headphone amplifier and QX digital-to-analogue converter, which can accept signals up to 192kHz as well as SACD-standard DSD. All four models are available in standard black or optional gold-plated finish: the TX is £900 in black and £2400 in gold plate, with the other three models selling for £990/£2490 apiece.

Also in the comfortably expensive sector of the market is the Reference DAC Media Bridge, US company **Audio Research's** take on the streamer/DAC, complete with internet radio, wired and wireless network connection and USB inputs for iOS devices, computers and 'thumb drives'. Using a valve-powered analogue stage, it sells for £13,998.

Finally, it's my sad duty to mark the passing of **Richard Hay**, the driving force behind the Heed Audio system reviewed in the August 2012 issue.



He started his career at Truvox, was chief engineer at Radford Audio, and in the early 1970s founded Nytech and later Ion Systems, where his design ideas were further developed and honed into the Obelisk range.

When Ion Systems ceased to exist, Hay gave a Hungarian company permission to continue manufacture: the latest products, with significant design input from Richard, are once more making an impact on the UK market. He'll be missed by all who knew him. **G**

- 1 Denon** has added Spotify's streaming music to its AV receiver range
- 2 Yamaha** has taken the Napster streaming route for its AV models: a 30-day free trial comes as standard
- 3 Roth** combines radio and Bluetooth in its DBT-100 and DBT-300
- 4 Chord Electronics** has redesigned its compact MX range
- 5 Audio Research's** Reference DAC Media Bridge is a high-end option

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Denon D-F109DAB

Denon's latest system has a range of options, matching convenience with performance

As track records go, Denon's history in compact systems is pretty much unmatched. It more or less invented the slimmed-down separates idea with its D-70 system, reviewed in these pages just short of 21 years ago, and has continued to develop its original concept ever since.

In February 2002, looking at the Denon D-100 system, Geoffrey Horn commented in *Gramophone* that it was 'very nicely calculated, each component contributing to an overall performance which will satisfy the ambitions of everyone except the more dedicated audiophiles'. That system was the spiritual ancestor of the D-F109DAB we have here. Then the electronics comprised a tuner, an amplifier, a CD player and a cassette deck; now we have a receiver (tuner/amplifier), plus CD and network music players.

In 2002 the D-100 system sold for £630, with the optional SC-M1 speakers adding £100; now the D-F109DAB starts from £480, the speakers adding £150 to the price. This is a system, available in black or silver, that can be configured to your own needs: that £480 will buy you the DRA-F109DAB receiver and DCD-F109 CD player, £600 the receiver and DNP-F109 network player, and £800 all three components.

All the components can be controlled by a single remote handset; however, add the network player and you gain the option of controlling the entire system using Denon's free remote app for Apple iOS and Android smartphones and tablet devices. This not only allows a smarter control interface but also puts information in the palm of your hand, thanks to bi-directional communication.

The DRA-F109DAB receiver has both FM RDS and DAB/DAB+ tuning plus an

SPECIFICATION DENON D-F109DAB



D-F109DAB

Type Mini component system

Price from £480 (see text)

DRA-F109DAB

Type Receiver

Power 65Wx2 (into 4 ohms)

Radio FM RDS/DAB/DAB+

Inputs Two analogue, two electrical and one optical digital

Outputs 1pr speakers, subwoofer, headphones

Accessories supplied Remote handset, radio antenna

Dimensions (WxHxD) 25x8.2x28.3cm

DCD-F109

Type CD player

Plays CD, CD-R/RW, MP3, WMA

Audio input USB

Audio output Electrical digital

Dimensions (WxHxD) 25x8.2x26.4cm

DNP-F109

Type Network music player

Plays MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC to 192/24, WAV to 192/24, ALAC, internet radio, Last.fm (where available)

Inputs Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Apple AirPlay, USB

Outputs Analogue stereo, electrical digital

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 25x8.2x25.7cm

SC-F109

Type Loudspeakers

Drive units 25mm tweeter, 12cm mid/bass

Sensitivity 86dB/W/m

Impedance 6 ohms

Dimensions (HxWxD) 29.6x18.2x23.7cm

denon.co.uk

amplifier able to deliver 65W per channel into 4 ohms. It's built using Denon's self-explanatory 'simple and straight' signal paths and has two sets of analogue inputs, two electrical and one optical digital input, a subwoofer output and a headphone socket.

The DCD-F109 CD player is a little unusual in only having a digital output for audio. However, it also has a front-panel USB socket

for the connection of iPods, iPhones and the like, or USB memory keys, and can play discs carrying MP3 or WMA files as well as CDs.

The DNP-F109 network music player connects to a home network wirelessly or via wired Ethernet, and has a choice of analogue or electrical digital outputs, a USB socket to the rear for iOS devices and memory keys, internet radio plus the Last.fm service, and



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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Denon system is more capable than its optional speakers suggest: try it with these cost-effective alternatives

Q ACOUSTICS 2020i

Part of the latest range from this very affordable brand, the 2020i standmount speakers are just £160/pr but capable of a sound with bags of vitality and refinement



MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BX2

Thanks to MA's in-house technology, these £250/pr speakers have a scale of presentation belying their size and price



acts as a hub for system control using the Denon app. It also provides AirPlay wireless connectivity, allowing music to be played either directly from an iOS device or from a networked computer running iTunes.

Finally, the optional SC-F109 speakers use a 25mm balanced dome tweeter and a 12cm mid/bass driver with a double-layer cone, in an enclosure just under 30cm tall.

PERFORMANCE

The Denon system is simple to set up and get working. From a stack of four boxes to playing music took me no more than 15 minutes, including connecting the system to the home network and setting up some radio presets and the iPhone app.

Apparent relatively quickly was that while the optional SC-F109 speakers are actually pretty good by the standards of such designs, they're a bit thick-sounding, with a slightly mechanical bass, whether you use them close to a rear wall to boost the low-end, with the port-bungs supplied to tighten things up, or out in free space. They're also rather treble-shy and tend to emphasise sibilants.

The system gets better when used with speakers some notches above this. I've suggested some cost-effective alternatives above but I also tried the Denon with some of my usual speakers – the little Neat Iotas and the PMC GB1 floorstanders – and found it went a long way towards exploiting the Neats' detail and involvement for close-up listening but was also happy driving the compact PMC floorstanders, which cost more than twice as much as the whole Denon package! While this system sounds a

little lightweight by the standards of much more expensive set-ups using a separate amplifier and streamer, for the money, and for the kind of small-to-medium-sized room in which it's likely to be used, its presentation of music is very acceptable indeed. There's fine bass definition and speed, if not ultimate low-end extension; and, while the treble plays things a bit safe and thus loses some presence, it's sweet, informative and nicely detailed.

The same goes for the midband, which is again controlled and smooth but makes a good job of vocal and instrumental textures and rhythms.

The best thing about the Denon system is that it's equally impressive whatever the source, from internet and DAB radio all the way through CD to higher-resolution music files. It can handle WAV or FLAC files up to 192kHz/24-bit and is certainly good enough to allow the benefits of this higher-resolution music to be heard – at least when the optional Denon speakers are swapped out for something more revealing!

Indeed, only one thing is likely to count against the Denon for some, and that's the lack of gapless playback when streaming music. This isn't a problem provided you don't want to play works with sections flowing seamlessly from track to track – such as some opera recordings – and it's par for the course at this level; but it's best to approach the Denon with this limitation in mind.

That aside, this is a superb little system for those wanting music in smaller rooms. Whichever configuration you choose, you're unlikely to be disappointed. **G**

DESIGN NOTES

Roger Batchelor

Product marketing consultant, Denon
On Emerson, Bach and Holst, and lossless music as the way forwards



Denon's Marketing Consultant is also a respected industry trainer, his involvement with the Denon brand going back to 1991 with then distributor Hayden Laboratories.

An accomplished bass player, his earliest musical influences were 'The Beatles, The Kinks and The Nice, and in particular keyboard player Keith Emerson', while early classical favourites included 'Bach, Grieg and Holst'.

He's been heavily involved in the tuning of successive generations of Denon products, working closely with his Japanese colleagues, and his most memorable musical experiences were the recording of the Mahler symphonies for the Denon label at Abbey Road, and his first rock concert – The Nice at High Wycombe Town Hall in 1968.

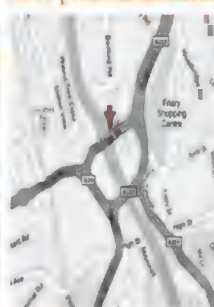
'Lossless music formats give you good sound quality without losing the convenience'

'Sound quality is of the utmost importance, even with portable devices,' he says. 'As AirPlay streams using Apple Lossless, if music is ripped in this format the sound quality is very good but you still have the convenience.'

'If a NAS drive is used on a home network with the DNP-F109, then you can play high-resolution audio tracks, too.'



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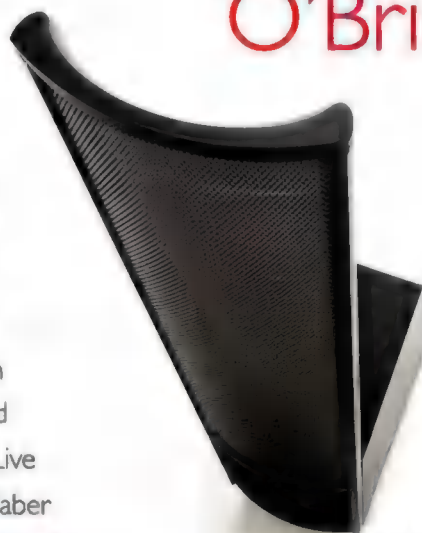
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Boston Acoustics

Boston Acoustics hired the skills of German speaker designer Karl Heinz Fink and the golden ears of Ken Ishiwata to create its latest range. The M series consists of three floor-standing models M250, M340 and M350 and the stand-mount M25 (above).

They are all slim-line designs with cabinets that are distinguished by two-layer sandwich panels that work as constrained layers to damp resonance. The midrange and bass drivers are Boston's proprietary 4" polypropylene units.

The tweeter is a variation on the ring-radiator theme that's anchored in the center, where there is a slight dimple. Finish is a leatherette-filing in a sandwich that can include either wood veneer or gloss black. These all new designs warrant an audition and are available from selected Music Matters stores.



Marantz

Well designed, performance driven and great value is the Marantz signature. The objective is simple - to engineer audio components and home entertainment systems which produce film soundtracks and music with realism in the home environment.

Ken Ishiwata, audio guru and Brand Ambassador joined us in our Birmingham store on 4th December for a hugely successful day meeting our customers and demonstrating just what makes Marantz so special through the superb new range of Boston M Series loudspeakers.

We stock and demonstrate a wide range of Marantz products from the multi-award winning CD6004 CD player / PM6004 amplifier combination and excellent MR603 mini system through to top of the range Premium Series two channel and AV Pre-amp processors.

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Streamer system could be Naim's 'big one'

It'll save you £1000 compared to the NaimUniti2, has a winning sound – and is slimmer, too

What we have here is a product I think could be every bit as significant for Naim as the original NaimUniti.

Just as that model opened up the brand to a whole new group of potential buyers – not to mention creating a significant revenue stream for a company until then best known for high-end systems involving a stack of identical-looking black boxes – so the UnitiLite is likely to attract many more into the Naim fold.

Why? Well, for a start the UnitiLite is almost all the NaimUniti2 is – a streaming music/internet radio player, digital-to-analogue converter, amplifier and CD player all in one box – but for about 60 per cent of the price. It sells for £1650, or £1895 with the addition of an optional DAB/FM radio module, against £2795 for the NaimUniti2: a handy saving in anyone's book.

It's also slimmer than the NaimUniti, its low-slung casework standing just 7cm tall, which is 1.7cm less than its 'big brothers', which may make it easier to slip into shallow shelves. And yet it still delivers 50W per channel, the same as the original NaimUniti, offers a direct digital connection for iPods, iPhones and iPads, provides three analogue inputs and five digital – including one of each on a single 3.5mm socket on the front-panel – and can be controlled by the remote handset provided or Naim's excellent n-Stream app running on iOS devices.

Internet radio is provided using the vTuner platform, allowing the user to set up favourite

'The UnitiLite is almost all the NaimUniti2 is but at £1650 it's only around 60 per cent of the price'

stations (or discover new ones) via a web page, then have those preferences transferred to the UnitiLite for listening. The system will stream a huge range of music in all current compressed, uncompressed and high-resolution formats, with the capability to go up to 32-bit/192kHz content should you ever be able to find any.

So how's all this been done for the money? A major part must be played by the CD mechanism, which is now a conventional – but high-quality – drawer-loader in place of the 'player in a drawer' swing-out system, complete with the magnetic puck used in

NAIM UNITILITE NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM

Price £1650

File formats played CD/CD-R, WAV, FLAC, Apple Lossless, AIFF, AAC, Windows Media-formatted content, Ogg Vorbis and MP3 files, up to 32bit/192kHz

Inputs Three analogue, two electrical digital, three optical digital, USB

Outputs One pair of speakers, preamp output, headphones

Other connections Ethernet, Wi-Fi, radio antenna (when £245 optional DAB/FM module fitted), mini-USB for firmware updates

Accessories supplied Wi-Fi antenna, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.2x7x30.1cm
naimaudio.com



New for the UnitiLite is a slimmer case and a conventional CD loader

past Uniti products and Naim CD players. That mechanism also allows the UnitiLite's slimmer dimensions, and the positioning of the combined input socket, headphone output and USB below the drawer-front.

PERFORMANCE

Set the Naim up, connected to a network via Ethernet (wireless is also available), let it run for a day or so and it's clear that while this system may be substantially less expensive than the NaimUniti2, corners haven't been cut. This is a thrilling, involving and satisfying listen with everything from internet radio streams to CDs right the way through to 192kHz/24-bit downloads, and clearly more than capable of driving a wide range of speakers to great effect.

I used it with both the little Neat Iotas and a pair of PMC GB1i floorstanders, and in each case the UnitiLite was entirely convincing with everything from delicate solo recordings to large-scale orchestral works, having both high levels of detail-retrieval and more than enough power in reserve to deliver the dynamics of a dramatic symphonic work.

The bass is tight yet well-extended, the usual Naim ability with the textures of voices and instruments is very much in evidence, and the treble has just the right combination of 'bite' and smoothness. The result is fine rhythmic ability plus an excellent sense of flow and drive to music: there's nothing 'hi-fi'

or artificial in evidence, even when the music has been downloaded to a computer, copied to a NAS drive and then streamed to the UnitiLite with the odd bit of compression and unpacking along the way.

What's more, the CD player shows no sign of being a stripped-down choice: it's the same mechanism found in the company's new CD5si player and sounds just as good as the disc-playing section in the NaimUniti2 I had to hand for comparison.

In fact, if there's anything wrong with the new Naim, it's going to be more of a problem for the manufacturer than the buyer. Yes, the NaimUniti2 has a little more weight, and a smidge more clarity and presence with the highest of hi-res music files, but to all intents and purposes the UnitiLite is so close to the standards of performance it offers that buying the less expensive system could be one of life's simpler decisions. And the £1000 you save would buy some rather good speakers, or a NAS drive and quite a few downloads... **G**



HOW TO TEST...

The UnitiLite may be Naim's entry-level system but it has power and poise to spare, plus a fine ability with highly detailed recordings. Test it with a disc such as Cecilia Bartoli's 'Mission' set of Steffani arias on Decca and it won't be found wanting.

ESSAY BEST OF 2012



It's been a year full of highlights...

When looking back over this year's products in order to choose the best, the real problem has been deciding what to leave out

One of the questions I'm often asked is how I manage to get products to review. The answer is that the main problem is trying to cram all the interesting new arrivals into the limited space available. Now comes the end-of-year task of picking the best for Audio Editor's Choice honours.

The most obvious contender is the **Naim ND5 XS** network music player, reviewed in the April issue: significantly more affordable than the company's NDX player, the ND5 XS is a very accomplished network 'tuner' able to bring to life everything from low-bitrate internet radio stations to the highest-resolution downloads widely available right now. It's upgradable, too – you can add the company's XP5 XS power supply, at which point you have a level of performance dangerously close to the NDX.

Also striking were the tiny **Neat Iota** speakers, reviewed in May: suitable for use on desktops, shelves or wall-brackets, the Iotas deliver a sound way beyond their size both in scale and finesse, with a fast, clean bass and superb imaging. Just about everyone I know who's heard them has been amazed.

On the subject of speakers, I was impressed with the compact **PMC twenty.21** standmounters I reviewed back in January last year but the true stars of the new range turned out to be the slim **PMC twenty.23**

speakers, featured in the November issue, and striking just the right balance between serious audio capability and domestic acceptability in their high-quality wood finishes.

Another review where I was taken with the quality of the finish and then went on to be delighted with the sound was that of the excellent **Heed Audio** CD player/amplifier combination in the August issue: separates more than a match for anything else at the price and with a fresh, contemporary look.

A towering achievement in amplifier design is the 'direct digital' **NAD C 390DD**, seen in the October issue: a £2000+ amplifier is hardly mass-market but the NAD is more than good enough to embarrass some much pricier designs. As I said at the time, the company's engineers have chosen to do things the hard way but all their work has paid off.

In a totally different way, the heavyweight **Onkyo TX-NR818** receiver shows that it is possible to get high-quality surround sound and excellent musical performance in one unit. As I reported when testing the receiver in September, the company is planning to expand its online music service, already available in Japan, to other markets: play high-quality downloads via the TX-NR818 and you can hear why.

To close, a few products with which I have had huge fun this year, and an honorable mention to the superb **Linn Kiko** system,

reviewed in the 2012 Awards issue, for being different, having a highly appealing sound and packing lots of 'lifestyle' appeal.

Finally, two products that sort of go together: **B&W's P3** headphones show the company bringing its speaker expertise to bear on making very attractive sounding personal audio, while the little **Audioquest DragonFly** combines a high-quality digital-to-analogue converter and headphone amplifier in one little USB stick. If you want high-quality music from your computer on the move – or indeed at home – look no further.

So, that's the best of 2012 – and with the products reviewed this month and some of the equipment I hope to have lined up over the next few months, it looks like 2013 is going to be even better! **G**

- 1 **Naim's ND5 XS** is the most affordable of the company's dedicated streaming players
- 2 **Neat's Iota** speakers are tiny, flexible on positioning and have a winning sound
- 3 **Heed Audio** produced separates with a fresh, contemporary design
- 4 **NAD's C 390DD** is a highly accomplished amplifier, built the hard way
- 5 **Onkyo's TX-NR818** is a heavyweight AV receiver with fine musical ability
- 6 **Linn's Kiko** has a 'lifestyle' look but backs it up with highly attractive sound and features

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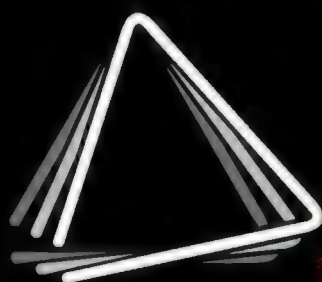
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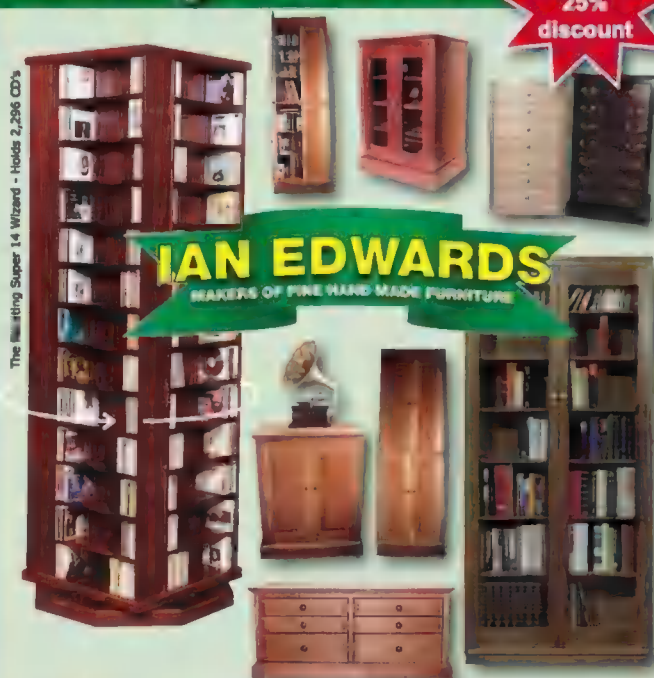
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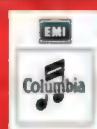
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Maria Friedman

The musical star on her exceptionally talented family, her gradual acceptance of opera and directing Sondheim for the first time

There was always a lot of music in our house. My dad, Leonard Friedman, who died in 1994, was a very well-known violinist, and we'd often go to his concerts. He was the leader of many symphony orchestras and co-leader of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Beecham. He also founded the Scottish Baroque Ensemble, which later became the core of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. My mum, Clair, was a concert pianist – she still teaches today – who did recitals with my dad until they had their children. And my brother, Ricky, is currently co-leader of the Royal Ballet Sinfonia in Birmingham. Whenever I meet someone who knows him, suddenly my status rises! He's one of those players...

Growing up, my siblings and I all learnt to play instruments. One of my sisters played the clarinet and the flute, the other played the cello, as did I. We studied with amazing people, but we weren't generally into exams – we just made music. We loved music for its own sake, and I think that's continued. Also, when you've got amazingly high achievers in your family, you know when you're not one of them! My brother damaged the tops of his fingers trying to squeeze out sounds from a not-very-good instrument – eventually he sold his flat so that he could buy the violin that he needed. I, however, would record myself playing scales on my cello and play them back while I sat on the windowsill and smoked!

My dad believed that practice is like a meditation – a way of not engaging in the world. I, on the other hand, love being part of the world; I relish every minute of it and I didn't want to be shoved into a practice room on my own. If I had pursued it, I could have been at the back of the orchestra – but I like tunes, and I want to be the person who sings them. My dad always said I couldn't sing, so I never had lessons. I think I sing like a cellist though – that tension of line, that stretching of sound, has gone into my guts.

I love singing, but it took a long time for me to understand opera. When I listened to opera, I used only to be able to hear the technique, so I found the overall experience alienating and not very enjoyable. But as I get older I find it more and more overwhelming. Two years ago I went to see *Eugene Onegin* at Covent Garden and it was unbelievable. Whether it's an opera or a musical, all I want is to forget where I am and be transported somewhere else; I want to be reminded of myself and lose myself all at the same time.

For me, musical theatre has never taken over from classical music, it's just what I do. When a musical is good, it can make you feel so much, so quickly – it's an uncomplicated route to the heart. Stephen Sondheim has a wry and forgiving way of looking at love, at the fallibilities of being alive. He manages to make big things out of ordinary things – he's talking to all of us about ourselves. And apart



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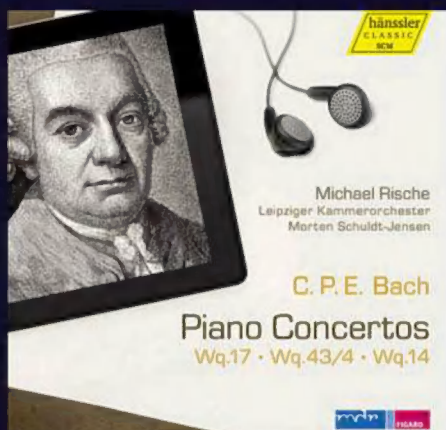
My dad and brother recorded this work, but it's hard to get hold of their version. This is a great alternative!

from the genius of his rhyming and inter-rhyming, he's funny and loves to laugh. When we started rehearsing *Merrily We Roll Along*, which I'm directing, he sent a telegram to the theatre: 'Dear Company,' it read, 'Please do everything that Maria asks you to do, and then I'll come over and fix it.' He's a naughty, naughty man!

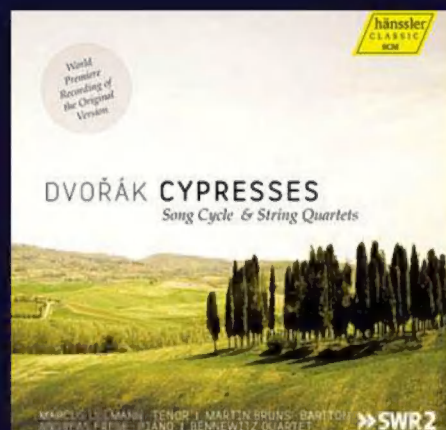
Directing Merrily We Roll Along is genuinely exciting. I was in it in my early twenties; but when you're in something, you know it less than anyone else. As a director you're much more part of the whole experience. Back in my twenties I had the fortunate experience of working for three weeks with Stephen and George [Furth], who wrote the book, so I know the flavour they wanted from the piece – even though, at the time, I was more interested in enjoying myself! This time around, I'm finding the whole process a revelation. You kind of fall in love with the people you've cast – I think they're all absolutely amazing. My mum came to see it and said, 'Your voice is in everyone'; it's kind of extraordinary, really, that the cast can reflect what you feel and want as a director. **G**

Maria Friedman directs *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Menier Chocolate Factory until February 23, 2013; visit menierchocolatefactory.com or call 020 7378 1713

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